

ALFRED  
**HITCHCOCK's**

July, 1987 \$2.00 U.S./\$2.50 Can.

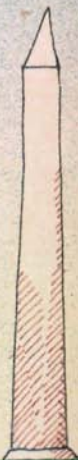
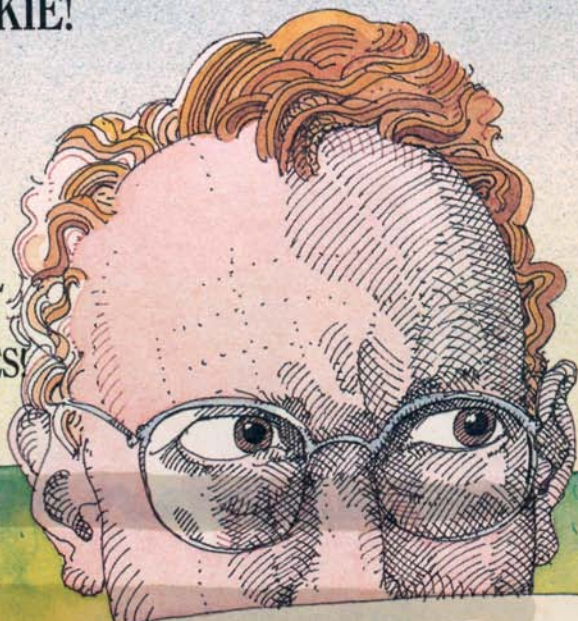
MYSTERY MAGAZINE



**ROGER,  
MR. WHILKIE!**

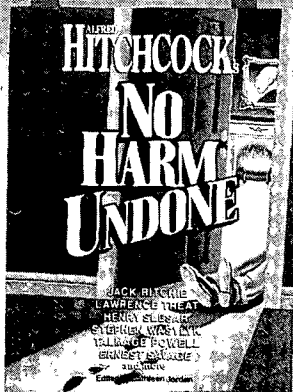
by Eric M.  
Heideman

...AND MORE  
SUSPENSEFUL  
NEW  
CRIME STORIES!



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED  
**The Washington Post**

With These New Anthologies from Longmeadow Press



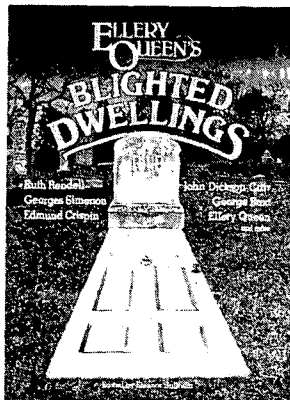
## Alfred Hitchcock's world of mystery and suspense

### Alfred Hitchcock's No Harm Undone

Edited by Cathleen Jordan

The master of suspense opens his files to compile 24 stories of mystery and intrigue, from some of today's most outstanding suspense authors: Lawrence Treat, Talmage Powell, Jack Ritchie, Henry Slesar and many others.

**\$7.95/#7533**



## Ellery Queen's world of ghostly beings

### Ellery Queen's Blighted Dwellings

Edited by Eleanor Sullivan

Renowned writers such as Ruth Rendell, Honore de Balzac, Lilly Carlson and others invite mystery fans to enter homes inhabited by the spectres of the mind, in this collection of 23 ghostly tales.

**\$7.95/#7536**

Pick them up today at your nearby Waldenbooks store. And while you're there, check out the Waldenbooks Mystery Club, a captivating book club with free membership a monthly newsletter and special savings for mystery and intrigue fans. Sign up today!

*America finds it at*  
**Waldenbooks**

Books • Audio • Video • Magazines • Book Clubs • Special Orders  
Over 975 stores nationwide.

To order call toll-free 1-800-543-1300, Operator #390

(Alaska and Hawaii call 1-800-545-1000, Operator #390)

SK271

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# CONTENTS



## SHORT STORIES

<b>ROGER, MR. WHILKIE!</b> by Eric M. Heideman	<b>4</b>
<b>KIET AND THE INFLATIONARY GAP</b> by Gary Alexander	<b>18</b>
<b>TO BE COLD, LIKE TREES</b> by G. Wayne Miller	<b>38</b>
<b>CLARA CATES AND THE HATCHETT MURDER</b> by C. J. Watts	<b>42</b>
<b>ISLAND OF THE SNAKE</b> by Kenneth Gavrell	<b>64</b>
<b>SONG OF THE OPEN ROAD</b> by Lorraine Collins	<b>88</b>
<b>THE DEAR DEPARTED</b> by Dan Crawford	<b>95</b>
<b>DECEPTIONS</b> by Ken Denbow	<b>101</b>
<b>NATURE'S OWN</b> by Thomasina Weber	<b>122</b>

## MYSTERY CLASSIC

<b>JEEVES AND THE LOVE THAT PURIFIES</b> by P. G. Wodehouse	<b>129</b>
--	------------

## DEPARTMENTS

<b>EDITOR'S NOTES</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>UNSOLVED</b> by Roger Hufford	<b>87</b>
<b>SOLUTION TO THE JUNE "UNSOLVED"</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>BOOKED &amp; PRINTED</b> by Mary Cannon	<b>149</b>
<b>MURDER BY DIRECTION</b> by Peter Shaw	<b>153</b>
<b>THE STORY THAT WON</b>	<b>155</b>

**ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE** Vol. 32, No. 7, July, 1987. Published 13 times a year, every 28 days, by Davis Publications, Inc., \$2.00 per copy in the U.S.A. \$2.50 in Canada. Annual subscription \$19.50 in the U.S.A. and possessions; \$23.00 elsewhere payable in advance in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 1932, Marion, O. 43305. Call (614)383-3141 with questions regarding your subscription. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing office. Canadian 3rd class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. © 1987 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. The stories in this magazine are all fictitious, and any resemblance between the characters in them and actual persons is completely coincidental. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Printed in U.S.A. All submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send Form 3579 to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 1932, Marion, Ohio 43305. In Canada return to 628 Monmouth Rd., Windsor, Ontario, N8Y3L1.

ISSN: 0002-5224.

Cover by Joe Ciardiello

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

**F**or the second time, St. Martin's Press in conjunction with the Private Eye Writers of America (PWA) is sponsoring a contest for Best First Private Eye Novel.

The winning manuscript will be published here by St. Martin's and in England by Macmillan, with a guaranteed advance of \$10,000. Anyone may enter as long as he has neither previously published a private eye novel nor has a contract for one with another publisher. Entries must be postmarked by August 1, 1987; the winner will be announced by September 30.

For a complete set of contest rules, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to:

PWA/St. Martin's Press  
Contest

9918 Avenue M  
Brooklyn, New York 11236

If private eye stories aren't quite your cup of tea but the classic whodunit is, especially classic whodunits written by Agatha Christie, you might be interested in a new publication—a newsletter, very nicely printed and designed, with some illustrations—called *A Woman of Mystery*. We've had a chance

to look over the first two issues and have enjoyed them.

Devoted to the study of Dame Agatha's works, the newsletter proposes to investigate each of her books in chronological order, one per issue. The first issue, for instance, four pages on *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, published in 1920, begins with a brief plot summary and then goes on to explicate many of the places, institutions, customs, and criminological details mentioned in that story. We learn about the neighborhood of Kensington, in London; the difference between barristers and solicitors; the characteristics of arsenic, bromine, and strychnine; and some interesting background about Scotland Yard and about coroners and inquests. The second issue, eight pages on *The Secret Adversary* (1922), explains what an A.B.C. shop is; provides a map of the London Underground, or subway; gives us recipes for *pêche Melba* and "Welsh rabbit," upon which Tommy and Tuppence dined; provides information about a number of London railroad stations; explains Whitehall and Pear's Soap; and so on. (Continued on page 148.)



*You are cordially invited to...*

# **Rendezvous With Murder**

on a unique mystery tour to England, the scene of so many classic mysteries. You'll visit the Old Bailey, attend private receptions with representatives from Scotland Yard and meet prominent English mystery writers.

As an extra-special feature, you'll participate in a "Murder Weekend" at a magnificent estate where you'll spend the weekend with a "killer." Here among the guests and staff will be a few less-than-genuine characters who will unveil a murderous scenario throughout the weekend. There will be plenty of clues (and a few red herrings) for you to follow. If you can figure out whodunit, an exciting prize awaits you!

But here's a chilling note: Each tour is limited to a very small number of amateur sleuths, so we recommend you reserve your place in the plot early. Don't miss this opportunity to play detective! Chills and thrills are guaranteed!

For **FREE BROCHURE** Call 1-800-428-7462. In California, 1-800-457-9515.

Or Mail To:

**ICTS / InterContinental Travel**  
4133 Taylor St., Dept. DVP  
San Diego, CA 92110

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

# Roger, Mr. Whilkie!

by Eric M. Heideman



**M**r. Whilkie had just passed his forty-seventh birthday, after twenty-one years of marriage and twenty-four of faithful labor in the Government Printing Office, when he became certain that someone was trying to kill him.

The discovery was gradual in terms of evidences accumulated, but his realization that those evidences led—could only lead—in one direction came quite suddenly, at four twenty-two P.M. on a

Wednesday in mid-July. Mr. Whilkie drew a red slash mark through the last *k* in "two pairs shorts—khakki," then looked up, sniffing rabbit-fashion as he was sometimes wont when trying to recapture a thought.

Something, he could almost sense through his pores, something was out of place on his desk . . . yes, the white-out. He reached into the top left drawer where it had predictably rested since he had been advanced to this desk eight years ago, but there was no white-out to be found.

It had been a quiet, uneventful day, as were nearly all of Mr. Whilkie's days, from his rising at six fifteen A.M., eating oatmeal and English muffins while reading the *Post*, and walking out his door at seven twenty-two, through hours of carefully examined words and punctuation, until this moment when everything fell off kilter. Vanishing bottles of white-out were simply not among the factors with which one had to contend in one's life.

Mrs. Sylverman, waiting patiently, said, "Did you lose something, Mr. Whilkie?"

"I—no. Here it is." (But in the *wrong drawer*!) He read her the next sentence . . .

. . . and heard Miss Gurney and Mr. Otani conversing on the other side of the room: "How long do you figure the old bozo will hang on?" "Oh, he'll be out after November, for sure." Their words became inaudible as Mr. Whilkie's efficient hands were discovering other things out of their proper places: scissors, masking tape, even the roll of Life Savers. *Someone else* had been in this desk. He continued reading to Mrs. Sylverman, fairly sure that his voice betrayed no further sign that something was wrong.

Mr. Brubbage walked up to his desk. "Hello there, Roger. Keeping up the fort?" Mr. Whilkie attempted to smile politely. "You know, we'd like you to give a testimonial for old Wortlandt two months from now when he retires. Think you can do that?"

It had been many years since it had occurred to Mr. Whilkie that he could say no to a superior. He said yes. "Knew we could count on you." Brubbage gave his hand three shakes. "You're a good man, Roger. You can't find so many first class workers these days, people like Wortlandt and Carcastle." He nodded significantly. "We're looking to you to fill their shoes."

Mr. Whilkie allowed himself a silent sigh. Everything going wrong all at once. Brubbage knew he was no speaker; why pick *him* to give a testimonial? Something about . . . fill their shoes . . . Carcastle. Carcastle!

Suddenly there was no confusion, no vague uneasiness that something might be wrong. Suddenly he *knew*. And, knowing, he froze the thought off altogether and went back to his proofreading.

Promptly at five P.M. Mr. Whilkie straightened his desk and got up to catch the bus to Rockville. On his way out the door his left foot connected with a misplaced wastebasket, almost toppling him. He was quite sure the basket had never been placed there before.

He saw, on his way out of the building, that the Printing Office bookstore was as usual drawing a steady flow of business. A strategic removal and wiping of his gray-framed glasses afforded him opportunity to see that to the left of two bored-looking cashiers, a man in a knee-length white coat was, in fact, hunched up in concentration before a shelf of pamphlets.

At the corner of the block where he was to catch his bus Mr. Whilkie observed that the lid to a manhole was slightly, but definitely, ajar. A heedless footfall in the wrong spot and . . .

The bus arrived and people surged into it, Mr. Whilkie waiting, as always, until nearly last. And when he had seated himself in the one remaining window seat, mopped his forehead with his handkerchief, and commenced looking out at the ever-bustling scenery, then, and then only, did he allow himself to think over the train of events, and the burst of intuition linking them together, that he had flash-frozen in his mind for the past hour, not permitting them, by a supreme effort of will, to interfere with the ordered carrying out of his duties.

Now that he felt free to look hard and clear at his discovery, he realized that it had shaken him to the very core of his quiet being.

Lest he be mistaken about something so vitally important, he followed the train backward through the manhole cover and the wastebasket to the man with the coat, the chatter in the office that afternoon (just which old bozo was that?), the invasion of his desk—and, yes, that damnable invitation from Brubbage. Fill Carcastle's shoes . . .

Mr. Whilkie shook his head from side to side at the wonder of it all. He was a fastidious worker whose regular habits—never a day's sick-leave—had drawn warm praise from his superiors, but it seemed to him that his life had otherwise been totally unexceptional.

He had, to his knowledge, no friends of odd political leanings and, beyond an occasional glass of brandy and a craving for mystery



novels (and, in his younger days, for movies), he was without vices. Yet, now, this new thing had entered into his life, and everything that had gone before stood transformed. Fill old Carcastle's shoes. The moment Brubbage had said that, he'd realized that Carcastle was gone, had been gone from the office for well over a year, simply vanished. Because no one had mentioned his absence, it had never occurred to Mr. Whilkie to think about it.

Still—be methodical. This much could be explained away. Review the other evidences:

\*In March, driving home from Connecticut, he had turned a corner and found himself bearing down on not one but *two* garbage cans and their former contents. Fortunately he had learned, driving a jeep in the army, how to bring an automobile to a quick stop.

\*He had known to look for the man in the white overcoat because for the past three weeks, whenever he had left for the day, he had seen a man browsing in the bookstore, wearing a white overcoat. There were, so far as he could discern from behind, three different men, but each of them wore a nearly identical coat. In Washington. In July. There was more: six times during those three weeks, while eating lunch in Union Station, he had spied one or another of those men dialing number after number on a pay phone.

\*Eight evenings ago (things were accelerating!), as he sat alone in his living room, Mr. Whilkie's attention had been jerked from the book he was reading by the *thwacking* impact of a bird against the window. He hurried outside, and saw—he was prepared to swear to it, although he told no one—a passenger pigeon, dead. A *passenger* pigeon, presumed extinct all these years, but really nurtured in some secret place so that it could kill itself against *his* window. Quickly, before his wife could return from her auxiliary meeting, he had fetched a shovel from the garage and buried the bird in the yard.

And, of course, that was far from all. He had vaguely known for months that all was not well—little things, an infinitude of little things, no two of them, till now, connected by a discernible thread. He closed his eyes and conjured up an image of himself the previous Saturday sitting up late to watch the World War II picture. As he sat nodding, in his bathrobe, the pilot turned from his control panel to the screen and said in a different, sharper voice, "Roger Willco." "That's Whilkie. R.W. Whilkie," he replied before catching himself. Now, days later, he knew the message *had* been for him. Somewhere in the television industry he had a friend, someone who had tried to warn him.

Amazing as it was, the evidence did seem to point clearly in this one direction. Someone meant to kill him.

It was singular—the most singular situation, he quickly realized, that he had ever been in. How had it come about? What had he done, to acquire such committed enemies?

Mr. Whilkie began to enumerate his accumulation of sins. It was not, he realized with mingled pride, pique, and modesty, an extensive list. He passed over such college indiscretions as a loud song and a drink too many or keeping a young lady past her curfew, and passed, too, the early, idealistic years in Washington. This thing would almost surely have had its beginnings in more recent times.

Six years ago, before his car was stolen and Mrs. Whilkie dissuaded him from driving the new car to and from work, he had backed into the right fender of a parked sedan, leaving a dent in it the width of his thumb. Instead of pinning a note with his phone number to the sedan's windshield he had, to later twangs of guilt, simply driven away. What if the accident had in fact been witnessed by the car's owner, a gangster who filed away his hatred until, years later, he had time to spare for a slow and thorough vengeance . . . ? Eighteen months ago he had given witness's testimony to an auto collision. There had been no serious injuries, but what if gangsters had been involved who could measure their vindictiveness?

The bus stopped at a transfer point and another torrent of people compressed themselves inside in a din of buffeting and toe-stomping. Mr. Whilkie squeezed closer to the window as a large woman with two grocery sacks splashed down next to him.

But what *consequential* thing had he done, he pondered, staring out at the muggy landscape. What departure from his scarcely varying actions had made some one or more persons so very angry. . . . Last year, pausing to observe a Dacotah Indian rally outside the White House, he had stumbled, jostling a chief who in turn jostled a brave playing tom-toms. Mr. Whilkie dismissed the incident; when one had to contend with a government and a society that were indifferent when they were not actively genocidal, one was unlikely to take murderous umbrage at one clumsy onlooker. No, he must have done or learned something more serious, more fundamental, to require assassination.

Mr. Whilkie had come no closer to resolving his difficulties when he left the bus and walked the remaining two blocks to his ramble-down brick home.

**A**t the sound of their front door opening, Mrs. Whilkie, a well-kempt, black-haired woman of forty-six, called from upstairs, "The roast beef will be ready in half an hour, Mr. Whilkie. Help yourself to the tomato juice." So saying, she resumed her watering of the upper division of her army of plants.

Mrs. Whilkie—or Barbara, as he always called her when he addressed her by name (there were no nicknames between them, and Barbara, since five or six years into their marriage, had studiously spoken of and to him as "Mr. Whilkie")—Mrs. Whilkie was a woman of some ambition, born at a place and in a time where the closest she could come to fulfilling that ambition was to play the genial, ubiquitous helpmate to a successful husband.

Mr. Whilkie, when they married, had seemed to have all the ingredients she desired: he was intelligent and hardworking, with a good job and the likelihood of rising to real influence. Then one and two and ten years passed, and he did rise in position and salary, but he still remained in the same office. And he was still—there was no getting around it—a proofreader.

Having fed the last of her azaleas, Mrs. Whilkie gathered up the biography she was reading of the wife of Aaron Burr and commenced descending the stairs.

Once inside the house Mr. Whilkie had lost no time in beginning to examine the living room for signs of anything slightly out of place (a task, he reflected, rendered much easier than it might otherwise have been by the people living in this household. He and his wife could go for as much as a year without anything's falling out of place). He was casting his eyes over the arrangement of coats on the coatrack when Mrs. Whilkie entered the room.

"Did you lose something, Mr. Whilkie?" she asked, possessing an eye as keen as his own for untidy actions. Her husband was not given to staring after things, whether coatracks or train accidents.

Mr. Whilkie turned—"jerked" was almost the word—to face her. "I'll get us some tomato juice."

"I hope you've remembered to invite everyone at the office to our party Friday," her voice followed him to the kitchen, not sternly but in the tone of one reciting out loud a grocery shopping list. "Be sure to remind Mr. Scully and that nice Mr. Burstein to come," she added during dinner. "I want everyone to hear his wonderful stories about the Riviera."

Her husband nodded compliance. Through dinner and afterwards, as they played gin, he supplied the usual, requisite nods

and "Oh, I see's" to their conversation, but Mrs. Whilkie could tell that, more than usual, his mind was elsewhere. More than that, he glanced at things, seeming surprised to find them where they always had been. As they were ascending the stairs for the evening she put a hand to his forehead but it seemed normal; if anything, a bit cool.

Feigning sleep, Mr. Whilkie thought about the occasion, seven months before, when the army colonel had entered the Printing Office irate about the printing of a document dealing with the manufacture of small bombs from parts lying about the home—a document which should still have been classified. Why hadn't they spotted it? Mr. Whilkie had heard no more about the complaint after Brubbage had kindly but clearly informed the colonel that such decisions were not made by the Printing Office, that the Printing Office simply processed the materials that came to them. Had—someone—checked further and learned that the proofing on that document had been done by Mr. Whilkie?

For the next two days Mr. Whilkie's behavior at the office was such as would be unlikely to make even the most suspicious coworker think that he found anything amiss. There were, it is true, the quick, darting glances above and behind him, coupled with the furtive siftings-through of his wastebasket; but so unostentatiously were these things done, so well did he maintain his quiet, vaguely mouselike demeanor, that, churn though his mind did those two days, he preserved the cloak of invisibility that had settled on him years before.

Lunch hours he spent in Union Station, peering over the top edge of a *Times* at the milling forms and faces embarking and disembarking. His three white-coated men were nowhere to be seen, either there or in the bookstore. That could mean nothing at all; then again, it could mean that they were onto him.

Friday evening, after eating a light dinner, Mr. Whilkie changed into his blue suit and read a *National Geographic* article about Lake Geneva until guests began arriving for his wife's party. Her parties drew a fair cross-section of mid-level Washington society: people from their club and from the Rotary, both of which Mrs. Whilkie had sagely persuaded him to join in order to widen their circle of acquaintance. Mr. Whilkie had invited several people from his office, the ones he could depend on not to become drunk and back him into a corner and talk at him.



Mr. Whilkie sniffed at his brandy, allowing the aroma to work its subtle havoc with the metric orderliness of his thoughts. This party—friends, dyed in the wool Washingtonians all, most of them arriving in the eager, adventure-loving bloom of youth, only to find as they grew middle-aged that if they were not as clever, or influential, or well-to-do, or happy, as they might once have hoped, still they were Washingtonians, and they couldn't leave (because they were Washingtonians). The older and closer to death they grew, the more they bragged of their insider's insight born of maturity. But did one grow wise living in such an environment, or merely wizened?

In R.W. Whilkie, as in all men, lay the seeds of his impending death. How long, if he took walks, and controlled his diet, and avoided thinking for more than an hour a day about the monomaniacal gold-starred clowns in Washington and Moscow who held Armageddon in their clenched fists, might a man of forty-seven hope to continue his existence? A quarter century; or thirty-five years? Forty? He thought about his great-grandmother Lydicke, who had become ninety-seven, spitting tobacco off her retired son's back porch. In two more quarters of a century how incomprehensibly different would this whirl-dervishing world be?

But enough of these misgivings; he would, as a matter of course, continue to live as long as he *could* live. The mind might think its secret thoughts, but the body struggled to preserve itself.

And here, very likely, at this party, were the person or persons who meant to kill him. Surely the plot must have been instigated by a friend or an acquaintance, someone who knew or worked with him. He might be important enough to stand in need of killing, but surely not so important that whatever threat he posed could be pinpointed from a distance.

He sipped the brandy, rolling it around on the tip of his tongue. Had he just poisoned himself? There were so many ways a really determined enemy could strike at one that it seemed almost quixotic to resist. Would they strike here, at a party ("In the midst of life we are in death," as the spinster intoned in which Agatha Christie novel? *And Then There Were None*? Yes, that . . .) or wait for a more private moment, when an odd accident would be near impossible to trace? Unless—unless he were dealing with an organization so big and so callous that they would obliterate an entire floor of party-goers to get at their intended victims. For their sakes he should at least check the obvious places where one might plant a bomb.

Mr. Whilkie wended his way as unobtrusively as he could through the throng, some of whom paused in their conversations to nod at him. (He felt suddenly fortunate that he was not one whom most people felt an urge to seek out for conversation). Nothing behind the drapes or in the azalea pots appeared to be out of order; the books on the bookshelves—but how could he be sure?—seemed all undisturbed in their places. Heading back to the room's middle he scanned the tabletop for telltale disturbances in the hors d'oeuvres.

Waiting carefully until no one was looking in his direction, Mr. Whilkie poked his head, then his shoulders, through the tablecloth and peered under the table—only to find himself face to face with old Smathers from State. "Hello," said Mr. Whilkie.

"Hello, old tuff. You haven't seen any Communists poking about, have you?"

After the guests had safely departed, the Whilkies lay in their respective beds, she attempting to concentrate on a Barbara Cartland novel, he staring up at the ceiling, resolutely counting the holes in the tiles.

Eventually she looked in his direction. "Did you lose something underneath the table tonight?"

He continued to look upwards. "I thought perhaps my handkerchief. It was in my pants pocket."

"Your pants pocket? I'm sure it wasn't when I pressed them yesterday."

"It was in the rear pocket."

"I'm sure I don't know how it could—" Mrs. Whilkie shook her head and switched off the light. Her husband, squinting into the darkness, resumed his counting.

**I**t was the following Monday, after an uneventful weekend, that Mr. Whilkie got on the bus to his office at the usual time only to step off eight blocks early. Even as a part of him watched his actions in amazement, he knew that he would not be reporting to work that day.

He could see, standing on this bustling street corner, that his body had something in mind; but what, precisely...? Why, to throw a curve at his pursuers. It stood to reason that if you were hunting an orderly and predictable man, your plans would be considerably flummoxed if he began to be unpredictable and disorderly. Yes, and more than that. If he began showing up at

unanticipated places at unforeseen times he might, serendipitously, be able to ferret out his foes before they could get him. He put his feet in motion.

Mr. Whilkie did not go to work that day, or the next, or the day after. Nor, though it pained him terribly, did he alert the enemy by phoning in. He roamed the streets, visited the monuments, hung about in joints from plush to seedy, ever alert to the potential clue about the motives and whereabouts of his pursuers. Sometimes he would round a corner, half expecting the boom to fall, in the form of blunt, plunging stone objects, or bullets from a passing car.

And, searching, he came to realize how long it had been since he had really *looked* at this city in which he had worked for so many years. Outside the sheltering confines of his office he soon found his head aching from the soup of aromas; the Supreme Court building was covered with graffiti; the leaves on all the cherry trees were brown. Once he sat above the banks of the Potomac, studying its coating of fetid brown bubbles that never burst. "It smells like milk from a dead cow," Mr. Whilkie remarked to no one. To his left a pinkish gray pigeon, its feathers coming out, stood and picked at itself.

Thursday at half past three he sat at a small table in the rear of a bar, drinking milk-laced coffee and attempting to piece together his findings. Nothing that he had seen these past days pointed conclusively to his own situation—demonstrators, street missionaries, people whose hatbrims covered their eyes. He had to keep in mind the fact that not everyone who did anything untoward had something to do with him. No, only one group of people. Somewhere in this city one person, or one group of people.

He gazed contemplatively at his table. It was sticky, covered with round spots left by beer glasses. Twenty years ago, when the Whilkies would drive in for nights on the town, bars had been gay, festive places full of sparkling lights. Now in daytime he could see that the sparkle came from tables stained with dust and alcohol, and spots on the bottles lining the counter. . . .

Not for the first time that week Mr. Whilkie pulled back from himself in wonder. Where; how, had he changed, to find himself so strongly and suddenly cynical? There was nothing new about these things he was noticing; why notice them now and not years before?

In his mind's eye he conjured up a face, a composite face of all the people at all the parties he had attended in Washington. It

wore an artificial expression; it had to, because it had no real expression. People at those parties weren't actually enjoying themselves, but if what they were seeking from Washington was real, it must therefore follow that Washington entertainments were really entertaining, so they worked and worked at it.

And there it was: you were frozen in a pattern. The details that one noticed, the things that one thought about, were as automatic as leaving the house for one's bus every morning at seven twenty-two. The composite face faded and was replaced by stately marble buildings whose marble chipped to expose cheap cement underneath.

He stuck his chin determinedly on both fists. He had to go through all of the possibilities systematically, until he had covered all that he could possibly think of. There was the government, of course; foreign governments; the mob; ambitious office rivals . . . A new possibility entered his mind. His wife was still, certainly, a handsome woman; surely she hadn't lost her ability to turn heads. What if she had a fervent admirer, some one of their circle who knew her faithful nature and realized that he would have to get rid of Barbara's husband to get a chance at Barbara? Who? But there were so many people, and they would keep it well concealed, and Mr. Whilkie had never fancied himself a mind-reader.

He noticed that the hand that refilled his coffee cup was black. Looking up to nod a thank you he saw that the only black people in the establishment were attendants. *Nothing really changes.*

After a few swallows Mr. Whilkie stood up. There was time for another brief investigatory stroll before catching the bus that would bring him home at the usual time. If he could resolve these difficulties without Barbara's ever being the wiser, it would be much to the good.

At the street corner he was accosted by a ferret-like brown-cloaked man who pressed a pamphlet into his hand. After crossing the street Mr. Whilkie read the pamphlet, which proclaimed the existence of a benevolent Martian supercivilization that would bring its loving wisdom to the Earth upon such time as a billion of its peoples could be induced to simultaneously doff their clothes and chant "Ares in pacem" some hundreds of times. To the furtherance of that end, a rally would be held at five that afternoon on the grounds of the Washington Monument.

For some subtle reason which he could not altogether divine, the pamphlet stirred Mr. Whilkie's interest. Mars . . . In all his poring over those unusual happenings that might supply a clue to the



identity of his hunters, he had overlooked one of the truly extraordinary moments of his life: the night he had seen three parallel lights, two green, one red, flying west in planelike fashion only to come to a full stop, hover, then shoot out of sight at a right angle.

Of course, many people had seen such things, and told of them, and lived on unscathed. But—he thought of a film he had seen with his wife years ago—suppose that some such witnesses were sought out, and replaced, by beings that looked and talked much like them? Mr. Whilkie was too level-headed to really believe in such things. Still—what would Samuel Spade—or Walter Mitty—do in his situation? What could throw Mr. Whilkie's foes, whoever they might be, more thoroughly off kilter than his attendance at a Martian Unification rally?

Shortly after two that same afternoon Mrs. Whilkie had telephoned her husband's office to ask if he had any objections to Dr. and Mrs. MacKelroy's coming over the next evening for bridge, only to learn that Mr. Whilkie was not at work, had not in fact been to work all week. They had postponed calling home to inquire after him, assuming that a man of his exemplary record must have a good reason for being absent.

Mrs. Whilkie put down the phone in considerable trepidation. Pretending to go to work while really going somewhere else was *very* unusual for her husband. The obvious possibilities flitted across her mind, but she dismissed them. Mr. Whilkie was not that sort of man.

Then what *could* he be doing? He had spent many hours of their marriage quietly thinking goodness knew what thoughts, but beyond the fact that constancy is itself rare, he had never been unusual in his actions. From year to year the largest interruptions of his ordered habits were his bimonthly drives to Connecticut for two quarts of brandy.

Mrs. Whilkie's raveled brow smoothed at a surprising thought. Could he be a—spy? What better cover could a government agent ferreting out subversives have than her husband's job and his translucent personality?

Still, still, a wife would be able to tell such things. Whatever had come over Mr. Whilkie had come over him quite recently. She almost thought she could pinpoint it to the Wednesday before the party. Whatever was disturbing him, it could not be anything so horrendous that a wife's understanding could not help but make it better. (And if there actually *were* anything horrendous, there

was always the additional understanding and help of Dr. MacKelroy.) She would simply have to broach it to him, gently, when he returned that evening from "work."

But Mr. Whilkie did not return that evening. She hesitated for some time, assuming that, whatever was keeping him, he surely knew what he was doing, but by nine thirty she was sufficiently alarmed to telephone the Washington police. The man who took her call was in none too amiable a mood, the station having been made particularly hectic that evening by the processing of some two hundred religious cultists who had been fished, nude, out of the Washington Monument's reflecting pool. The man took down the description of her husband and called her back within the half hour. Yes, they had information on an R.W. Whilkie, had him, in fact, right there in the station . . . *behind bars???*

She drove to the station, paid her husband's bond, and drove him home, listening to him mutter, between sneezes, about "camouflage," and "escape." By two A.M., through gentle but relentless coaxing, she had extracted from him in reasonably connected form the tale of his doings, these past days, and the reasoning behind those doings.

At three seventeen A.M., after Mrs. Whilkie had tucked him into bed and herself fallen asleep, he lay fiercely thinking, although his eyes were closed.

He still had not told her everything. He had not told her of the daft, good-hearted people splashing about in the reflecting pool, of the young woman who giggled as she told him that he reminded her of her uncle. He had not told her of the sadness that enveloped him when the police arrived and compelled him to re-don his identity, layer by layer and button by button. He had not told Barbara that, for the first time in a dozen years, he had had fun.

His eyes blinked open. A fog that had been pressing down on his shoulders, its tendrils blocking his eyes, was suddenly gone. He saw that all of the clues led, indisputably, in one direction. Although they hadn't met in too long a time, he knew the man who wanted R.W. Whilkie dead.

**D**r. MacKelroy sat on the Whilkies' living room couch, his right arm about Mrs. MacKelroy and a scotch and soda dandling on his left knee. "So you see, d'ya na, Roger, that ye have taken a series of everyday moondane occurrences and blown them up into threats on your life. Ye follow me there?"

Mr. Whilkie laughed ruefully. "Yes. Yes. I've been very foolish, but I promise it won't happen again." He stood up, headed for the kitchen, paused to squeeze his wife's hand. "I'm going to have another glass of milk, dear." She nodded approval; when was the last time he had called her "dear"?

Quietly Dr. MacKelroy continued, "I canna' recommend a vacation for your husband too soon. He's been working turrible hard these twenty year an' a week or ten days in the mountains'd work wonders."

Mrs. Whilkie nodded dutifully as Dr. MacKelroy continued dispensing common sense. Her eyes wandered toward the kitchen doorway. Why was her husband taking so long? She called, "Mr. Whilkie?," adding, in a softer voice, "Roger?"

The small pipe bomb that knocked Mrs. Whilkie and her guests off their feet not only leveled the kitchen to smithereens. It also removed every trace of Roger W. Whilkie from the face of the earth. Only his wedding ring was found—its loop broken open by the blast.

The young man driving a Rabbit down an entrance to the Beltline Freeway slowed his car at the sight of the hitchhiker—a gray-spectacled, slightly built, fortyish man of medium height, with faded blue shirt, black corduroys, and a knapsack draped over his left shoulder. The driver opened the door and the hitchhiker, before he could dissuade him, had clambered over the seat divider into the back seat.

"Hi, the name's Bill," the driver said, extending a hand behind him. "What's yours?"

Grasping it firmly, the older man said, "Some people call me—Spike."

"Oh. Uhh . . . where are you heading?"

"Switzerland, by and by. There's no hurry, though. No hurry at all."

The perplexed driver swung his head forward and put the car back in motion. The compact man in the back seat closed his eyes, his entire face collaborating in a quiet smile.

# Kiet and the Inflationary Gap



by Gary Alexander

**T**he Kingdom of Luong may be described through comparisons to nations, states, and cities that actually exist:

**AREA:** Roughly equal to Cuba or Ohio or Liberia.

**POPULATION:** Comparable to Panama or Utah or Northern Ireland.

**CLIMATE AND TOPOGRAPHY:** Quite similar to Burma, Thailand, and Laos, its neighbors in this fiction.

**CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY FORM OF GOVERNMENT:** Liechtenstein and Monaco, though they are not models.

**PER CAPITA INCOME:** Equivalent to Bolivia and Indonesia.

**LITERACY RATE:** The same as Iraq, Peru, and rural Mississippi.

**POPULATION OF HICKORN, LUONG'S CAPITAL:** Iceland or Des Moines or Spokane.

**AMBIENCE OF HICKORN:** Singular.

**B**amsan Kiet, Hickorn's superintendent of police, spent his annual two-week furlough, as always, with his half-sister and brother-in-law. They were farmers who grew rice on the Ma San River's rich alluvial plain, twenty kilometers from the city. This isolation from crime and Hickorn's pace was



glorious and cathartic, and Kiet could not wait to get back home.

Perhaps it had been his eagerness to flee urban woes or perhaps it was the inflexibility that accompanied middle age, but Kiet had refused to change his furlough schedule despite his knowledge that the monsoon season had passed unusually early. Kiet had arrived on the very day that dikes were being opened, paddies flooded. It was planting time.

All able-bodied members of a farm family participate in planting. Much needs to be done quickly. Kiet could not refuse. To do so would insult his relatives and, worse, his ancestors, who had rightfully taught worship of the land and its bounty.

Kiet was of Caucasian height and bulk, an oddity amongst his short, lithe countrymen. With slacks rolled to his knees, bare feet and calves in water, torso stooped over to insert tender seedlings in the tepid muck, Kiet was never more aware of the disadvantages of size and softness. His half-sister, her husband (customarily sullen toward the city-bred Kiet, but now serenely smug), and their five children skimmed through their task like water bugs. Kiet trailed far behind, woozy from heat and pain and exhaustion.

It was said that Luongans who had lost their kinship to

the land could immensely improve their spiritual well-being by communing with the soil. Kiet was more skeptical than ever. His joints and muscles told him that his *overall* well-being had retrograded, drawing him even closer to said ancestors. And as was also claimed, the simple life and the lack of technological amenities like plumbing did not necessarily bring an incandescence to his soul.

Kiet begged off a day early, staggered to his Citroën, and returned to Hickorn. Poets and essayists, those urban intellectuals and playful cynics who coin the romantic homilies, had best not encounter him in a criminal justice matter in the near future.

**K**iet told no one of his arrival. He wished to prepare a grand meal at home and enjoy it in privacy before resuming his police duties. His favorite dish was fried shrimp, exquisite shellfish dredged from the floor of the Ma San River. The perfect accompaniment would be quantities of iced Golden Tiger beer, a smooth local brew inexplicably termed Amber Death by westerners.

Captain Binh, Kiet's young adjutant, had dutifully deposited his last paycheck in the Royal Luongan Bank. Kiet

withdrew adequate funds and went to his favorite fishmonger, a man named Lo who operated a stall at the public market and sold Hickorn's freshest seafood.

Kiet asked Lo for a full kilo. The quoted price, of course, was outrageous. There were no set prices in Luong; all goods and services were subject to bargaining.

Kiet, playing his part, threw up his hands theatrically and offered half.

Lo flinched as if he had been struck and lopped ten percent from his figure. Kiet groaned and raised his ten percent. They edged toward the ultimate middle ground, but when Lo refused to move from three thousand Luongan zin, Kiet knew something was wrong.

"Two thousand is fair," Kiet said. "It always has been."

"Two weeks ago, yes, superintendent," Lo said nervously. "But you know how it's been."

"No," Kiet said, "I don't. I have been planting rice."

"Ah," Lo said, smiling. "I worried at the sight of you, superintendent. I am glad to learn that you aren't permanently crippled."

"Thank you," said Kiet, who was not smiling. "Why can't I have my shrimp for two thousand?"

"Prices have gone suddenly wild in Hickorn. You must pay

more for everything," Lo said, shrugging. "If I could sell to you for two thousand, I would. At three thousand, my profit is nothing. If you weren't my good friend and the police superintendent, I'd have to hold at thirty-five."

Kiet's stomach was growling. He paid the three thousand, vowing to himself to trade henceforth with another fishmonger.

Lo examined the bills closely, clamped a hand on Kiet's wrist as he picked up the bag of shrimp, and said, "Superintendent, I am so sorry, but I cannot accept this money."

"Why not, please? Do you have a conscience after all?"

Lo handed Kiet two of the six five-hundred-zin notes he had given him. "Here, look. Hickorn is flooded with it. I see some every day."

Kiet looked at one. On the face was a portrait of His Royal Highness, Prince Novisad Pakse. The borders were ornately scrolled, with the "500" designation on the corners. On the reverse was a depiction of the Royal Palace and more scrolling. The bill was colored in greens, blues, reds, and golds.

It appeared to be a normal piece of currency. Though worthless in international trade, the Luongan zin, in Kiet's opinion, was the most artistically engraved currency in the world.

It was beauty, whereas the staid, monochromatic American dollar was brutish power.

Kiet looked at the second note. Then the first again. He made mumbled apologies to Lo, stuffed the notes in his pocket, and skulked out. The serial numbers were identical.

Kiet drove to headquarters. Captain Binh's delight in seeing him fell just short of an embrace.

"Superintendent! I've been trying to reach you, but you've never told anyone where your half-sister's farm is."

Kiet settled gingerly into a chair. "The omission was intentional, but a timely rescue would have been appreciated. Next year I shall not repeat that error. I will even draw you maps."

"You are moving so slowly. Have you been in an accident?"

"In a sense. A protracted one. You wished to talk to me about crazed prices and counterfeiting, did you not?"

"So you've heard already. I don't know if they are interrelated, superintendent. I think they might be. Prices are inflated, yes, but my concern is the funny money. There are baskets of the stuff in the property room."

"Excuse me. Funny money?"

"That's the slang. Funny money or queer. I learned that in Washington."

Captain Binh had trained for a year in the American capital, with their District of Columbia's police. He had returned home with tales of wondrous efficiency, of radio cars, computers, and plea bargaining. His education had little practical application in Hickory, but Kiet nodded and again assumed the role of eager and patient listener.

"In Washington we raided a dilapidated house on L Street. The suspect was producing perfect fifties and hundreds on a stolen photocopy machine, a state-of-the-art laser copier that printed in color on both sides of ordinary paper. The suspect was a parolee and a drug addict with no skills. My supervisor and the Secret Service agents who accompanied us said that anybody can counterfeit these days. Before high technology, counterfeiters had to be skilled printers."

"Are there any of those magical machines in Luong?" Kiet asked.

"Not to my knowledge," Binh said. "We have checked newspapers, printing companies, and various government offices. Their copies are basic black and white and their printing presses are either obsolete linotypes or offset. The latter are capable of manufacturing passable queer, but we've discovered no evidence that they are being used

illegally. Superintendent, I don't recall a prior counterfeiting case in Hickorn."

"Nor do I," Kiet said. "The official rate is four hundred zin to one U.S. dollar, but western visitors know better and exchange on the black market for six hundred. Sadly, our zin isn't worth the effort."

"Until now. It is if the quantities are enormous."

"Evidently so," Kiet said. "Which denominations?"

"Five hundred; one thousand; two thousand; five thousand; and ten thousand zin. The middle range. They haven't bothered with the one hundred and two hundred, and they're smart enough not to attract attention with the twenty thousand and fifty thousand."

"There is no inkling of the source of this, uh, queer?"

"No, superintendent. We only know that they are excellent forgeries and that they are everywhere. By the way, Minister of Finance Bu has asked that you call on him at your earliest convenience."

The Ministry of Finance controlled the Royal Mint. Kiet rose in careful stages and said, "A good place to start. What are we doing, captain, to counteract this nonsense?"

"We're monitoring merchants and confiscating bogus bills," Binh said helplessly. "But we will soon need

to requisition more baskets."

Kiet left, thinking of an Americanism that Binh had once quoted him, something about horses departed from a corral.

**T**he Ministry of Finance building, formerly a French bank headquarters, was acquired by the Kingdom of Luong after independence was granted in 1954. Paris financiers were only too eager to flee a colonial economy handed over to the natives. Its facade, a Greco-Roman mish-mash of stone and pillars, was unchanged, thus retaining the desired effect of aloofness and superiority to the citizenry.

Such was Kiet's opinion, an opinion reinforced whenever he was in the presence of Minister of Finance Totisa Bu. Kiet regarded the man as loyal to His Royal Highness and relatively honest, but too professorial, too much the academic to be an effective administrator.

Bu held an advanced degree from an American university that was a member of a select and botanical-sounding grouping known as Ivy League. He wore three-piece suits, monogrammed shirts, and a gold pocket watch. Kiet had to remind himself that he was in the company of a fellow Luongan.

"Superintendent, I thank you for seeing me so promptly after

your leave. It seems we have a mutual problem. I never involve myself in petty crime affairs, but the counterfeit money now circulating in Hickorn is unfavorably impacting our fragile economy."

"A crime, therefore, not petty, sir."

"Well, yes, you know what I meant, Kiet. I need to know what progress has been made."

Kiet deflected the inquiry. "I hoped you might be of assistance, sir. The Royal Mint is part of your ministry."

"I've been assured by my mint director that all safeguards have been observed. No supplies are missing and no mint employees worked past their normal shifts."

Kiet was skeptical, but if incompetence had been concealed, careers protected, Bu's assertion would be impossible to disprove.

"In fact, just to be absolutely sure, I ordered the cessation of production when the first bogus bills were discovered. The Royal Mint is closed and under heavy guard."

"When were the first bills found?"

"Approximately two weeks ago."

Coinciding with my departure, Kiet thought. He said, "What exactly is the counterfeiting doing to our economy? I have a slight understanding

on a personal level, having been overcharged for Ma San shrimp earlier today."

"That is, yes, a common example," Minister Bu said without interest. "The phenomenon created by the abundance of bogus zin in the marketplace is a variation of the inflationary gap theory."

Bu swiveled in his chair and plucked a book from shelves behind his desk. Kiet suppressed a groan.

"Here it is, superintendent," Bu said, opening it to a page of fine print and a line graph.

"Of course," Kiet said, nodding.

"The entire spectrum of the theory is much too complex for a layman," Bu said.

"Certainly," Kiet said.

"When the money supply exceeds the cost of available goods and services, a gap occurs."

"An inflationary gap," Kiet said.

"Excellent, superintendent. Prices are bid up and the gap is filled. The excess in purchasing power causes price increases and an inflationary spiral. Unfortunately, our economy is so modest that an influx of excellent-quality counterfeit zin can and has dramatically raised Hickorn's money supply. And the spiral continues."

Kiet was silent.

"Unless the counterfeiting is stopped shortly, superintendent-

ent, the value of money saved will be destroyed and there will be no further incentive to save. Investment will dry up. Disaster, Kiet. Economic disaster on the order of Germany's in the 1920's, when a wheelbarrow of marks was required to buy a loaf of bread."

"I agree, sir."

"Then what is your program for the elimination of this menace?"

"To capture the counterfeiters, Minister Bu."

"Nothing more specific?"

"To capture the counterfeiters as soon as possible, sir."

Bu's eyebrows flared. "Well, I had expected you'd have a more formalized and strategic approach on line by now. For my part, most of my waking hours are devoted to studying papers."

"Excuse me, sir?"

"Theses, dissertations, articles in scholarly journals. Anything dealing with the impact of macrocounterfeiting on a Third World economy and a concomitant solution. So far I've been unable to find an applicable parallel."

Kiet hated the term "Third World." It was to him a child characterized as a waif. He especially despised the words coming from the lips of a Luong. He controlled his temper and said, "Please inform me when you do, sir. I'll be very

grateful for any help you can provide."

Bu said thank you, he would. Kiet escaped the stolid building puzzled, with the vague notion that he knew less than when he entered.

Kiet left the man who considered himself Luong's leading economist and drove directly to the man he *knew* was Luong's leading economist. Mr. A. Singh, proprietor of Bombay Tailors, was unlettered. He was also a liar, a confidence artist, and generally amoral. His tailor shop was in downtown Hickorn, in a district of exclusive stores and cafes that catered to westerners and affluent Luongans. Indian and Chinese merchants were the engines of Hickorn's economy, and Singh led them all in horsepower. His trade was not cloth and thread, it was smuggling and black market moneychanging. If Totisa Bu's books qualified him as guru of Luong's economic past, Singh's cunning conceded to him the present and near future.

Singh was a soft, swarthy man with liquid eyes and no hard edges. He presented Kiet with a jittery and blinding smile. "Superintendent, it has been too long! How may I be of service? You are a man made for a silk ascot."

"I cannot pay your prices."



"Ah, but a sizable discount to a gentleman who protects us from hooligans is a just reward for devotion to duty."

"Singh, please recall that I have refused all your previous bribes. If you really care to make me happy, please discuss candidly this counterfeiting problem."

Singh spread his arms and sighed. "Terrible, is it not? I cannot quote an accurate price for a suit. From the time measurements are taken until it's ready, the cost—"

"Singh, you don't know a lapel from a cuff. The suits you display as a front are manufactured in Taiwan with 'Made in Italy' labels sewn in. What are you paying for the U.S. dollar at the moment, please?"

Singh's shoulders slumped in defeat. He said, "One thousand zin, superintendent. Two weeks ago it was six hundred. Next week, who knows? It's crazy. I don't like the uncertainty. If I gamble and stockpile one currency or another and the prices zoom or dip, I could be ruined. I love stability."

"As do I. Tell me what you know of the counterfeiting operation, and perhaps stability can be reached."

"I swear, superintendent, I know nothing. This counterfeiting and inflation, if it doesn't cease, I'm finished."

There was enough anguish in

the Indian's face to convince Kiet that he was telling the truth. "Does anybody try to pass counterfeit zin to you?"

"Yes. Some accidentally, some not. I have made a list of repetitive serial numbers and I check the notes carefully."

"Who has been changing large amounts of zin for western currency lately?"

Singh pointed a finger upward. "The usual powerful men, superintendent. Senior army officers, high-level bureaucrats, private businessmen. They cannot wait to transfer our impotent zin into hard currency and into their Swiss bank accounts. It is a shame, isn't it?"

"Individuals changing larger-than-average amounts into what currencies, please?"

"Superintendent, you are asking me to reveal a business confidence."

Kiet merely stared. Singh averted his eyes after a moment and said, "Mayor Tia. American dollars."

Kiet hesitated, collecting his thoughts. Since Fop Tia's election nearly four years ago, he had lobbied to transfer the Hickorn police department from an agency of the Ministry of Defense to an instrument of his own office. Kiet had powerful friends in the ministry and was able to forestall what he believed would be a disastrous merger.

Tia was a greedy businessman, a commodities broker who traded and speculated in corn, rice, and tobacco. Upon election, thanks to pressure from the U.S. Embassy, Tia had put his holdings in a blind trust managed by his partners. His avarice then shifted from money to power, and much of his mayoral energy was devoted to expansion of his office's authority.

The democratic election process was alien to Luong's tradition of mandarin appointees. Western urging had yielded a compromise in which Parliament members and municipal officers were selections of the people. Kiet had no strong feelings about this new system, one way or the other. Cronyism dictated power in the old process, graft in the new. No essential difference.

Nor had he begrudged Tia's victory. His opponent was also wealthy and unscrupulous. Both had imported the quaint western customs of buying votes through neighborhood committeemen and stuffing ballot boxes, so when the total vote count exceeded by twenty percent the population of Hickorn, Kiet assumed that Tia's narrow margin was probably an accurate and largely apathetic statement of preference.

The next election was bare months away. Several serious challengers were building con-

siderable support with the people, who were weary of Tia's shenanigans. Kiet knew them to be honest men. It promised to be an interesting and spirited race.

"Mayor Tia is able to buy dollars on his mayor's salary?" Kiet said cynically. "He must be a skillful budgeter."

"Blind trust or not, superintendent, you know that Tia keeps a hand in his commodities business."

"Yes, but not as active a hand as he would like. Have you heard how that business is going? I've been told that it has declined since Tia isn't operating it day by day."

"True. His partners are not as astute as he. And this inflation must also be harmful. If you agree to sell a kilo of rice for five hundred zin a month from now and the price has shot to a thousand, ah, you are a big, big loser."

An economic fact that likely eliminated Mayor Fop Tia as a counterfeiting suspect, Kiet thought. "How much is he changing, please?"

"Twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of zin every other day, superintendent."

Kiet's mouth fell open.

**M**ayor Fop Tia was a short and pudgy man who wore gold chains and open-collared

jackets. Captain Binh had described the garb to Kiet as an obsolete American fashion known as polyester leisure suits. Binh's description was made in contempt, but Kiet wasn't visually offended and saw in the casualness and bright colors a studied attempt to appear relaxed and benign.

Tia's office furnishings were European, bulky creations of chrome, glass, and leather that tended to shrink their owner. By one wall was a computer, a copy machine, and a postage meter, paraphernalia that implied a progressive mind and a work ethic.

Kiet was fooled by none of this. He was seated across from a cobra.

Tia glanced at his watch and said, "Kiet, I'm running short on time. I have a luncheon speech to deliver to a group of merchants. With reelection coming up, I have to do these things. Democracy has strange by-products, doesn't it? Life was infinitely simpler when I was a humble businessman. I wonder if politics is worth it."

Tia spoke rapidly, without pausing for breath. Kiet ignored his assertions: "I came home from furlough to find Hickorn in financial chaos."

"The counterfeiting, yes. The perpetrators should be publicly executed. Tied and blindfolded in front of sandbags and shot."

"We don't do that any longer, but I share your sentiment. A lack of perpetrators is an additional problem."

"Why come to me, then?" Tia said wryly. "If you were in my chain of command, we would be cooperating with great efficiency, but you are not."

Here we go again, Kiet thought. He said, "Mr. Mayor, I'm abusing your valuable time only because you know many people and have a sensitive ear on the pulse of Hickorn."

"If I could assist you, Kiet, I would. Use *your* valuable time to capture the counterfeiters."

"Captain Binh, my young adjutant, speculates that the notes may have been printed on an advanced photocopying device."

Fop Tia swept an arm toward his machines. "Marvelous gadgets, these, but not that good. They only aid me in serving Hickorn's citizens."

"I wasn't accusing—"

"You're a fool if you are," Tia interrupted. "If these criminals impoverish Hickorn, I'm doomed on election day. I'm the mayor. I'll be blamed."

"Your machines look fairly new," Kiet said.

"They are. An American aid grant allowed me to modernize and move my administrative procedures out of the Stone Age."

Kiet thought it ironic that foreign aid was being returned

to its origins in the form of dubious technology. He thought of his half-sister's farm and how substantial was land and the food that grew on it, in comparison. "I envy you your modern conveniences, Mr. Mayor."

"If you were in my table of organization, Superintendent Kiet, I could make arrangements that would slake your envy."

The expected and desired response, a hungry mouth closed on a chunk of bait. "It is a new perspective and I am a flexible man, Mr. Mayor. Who, please, supplied this equipment?"

"Various vendors. My assistants handle purchasing," Tia said abruptly. "If you'll excuse me, I have a speech to deliver."

Kiet thanked Fop Tia for his time and departed. He was pleased. While Tia had spit out the bait, he had requalified himself as a counterfeiting suspect.

**T**he American Embassy building was new, dedicated in an elaborate ceremony by Prince Pakse six weeks ago. It was four stories high, the same as the Soviet Embassy, but precisely one meter taller. The architectural style was that of a shoebox placed on end. Sunlight throbbed against steel framework and mirrored glass. Hickorn cynics had dubbed it the Glass Palace.

It reminded Kiet of Fop Tia's furniture.

Ambassador Smithson was available to see Kiet without an appointment. Immediately. Kiet had learned to coexist and almost like this man whose sole concern seemed to be communism. Ambassador Ritchie, Smithson's predecessor, an appointment of the prior American president, had also been single-minded, obsessed with human rights. When Kiet persuaded Ritchie that he did not use cattle prods and other hideous tools during interrogation, they got along famously.

The communist Luong Rouge guerrillas, who made occasional nuisances of themselves, were concentrated in the northern highlands, out of Kiet's jurisdiction, so it was much harder to get Smithson's attention in areas of common urgency. Kiet, however, had ingratiated himself by furrowing his brows in deep concern during abstract lectures on the Domino Theory. Smithson, gradually, came to regard the Hickorn police superintendent as a competent crime buster who never overlooked the possibility of Marxist involvement.

"Superintendent, sit down, please," Smithson said. "I'll get right to the bottom line. Counterfeit zin. I have a mound of it in my desk."

Today, apparently, there

would be no political abstractions. Kiet said, "And I have some in my pocket."

"If these were normal times, I wouldn't understand. The zin isn't worth the paper it's printed on."

Kiet did not need to be reminded by this man that his country's currency was wall-paper. He maintained his composure, trying not to take it personally. "In sufficient quantities, Mr. Ambassador, anything has value. And in what context, please, are these times abnormal?"

Ambassador Smithson smiled tightly and winked. "You know what happened last week. It's rather obvious that the Rouge are planning to mount a major offensive."

Last week? Oh yes. He had read it in a newspaper. The Rouge had ambushed a Royal Luongan Army convoy, disabling a truck, a Jeep, and wounding two soldiers. It was their most successful attack in eighteen months. "Oh yes."

"We monitor their large-scale troop movements by satellite, you know. Things are brewing."

Space vehicles whizzing about in orbit, snooping on inept revolutionaries who moved in bands of ten and twenty? Kiet nodded solemnly and said nothing.

"Rouge printers have taken a quantum leap from propa-

ganda pamphlets, haven't they?"

They had? "Excuse me, Mr. Ambassador, but the Rouge leaflets I've seen are quite crude."

"Past tense, superintendent. Before the introduction of Soviet hardware. What better way to waltz in and take over than after an economic collapse you've orchestrated?"

This was going badly, Kiet thought. He had dragged himself here to learn of western printing technology in Luong and Smithson was generating fantasies of Russian Xeroxes being parachuted into the highlands. "Minister of Finance Bu and I talked earlier," he said. "Minister Bu and others I have interviewed agree that the motive is purely mercenary. An inflationary gap was caused incidentally by greed."

"Bu's a good man, an intellectual from my old alma mater. We're both Yalies, you know. But between you and me and the gatepost, superintendent, Totisa keeps his head buried too far in his books."

Yalies? A secret society with roots to the botanical Ivy League? Kiet did not care to pursue this puzzle. "Mayor Tia, likewise, implies that the counterfeiters' motives are monetary. He is worried that the consequences to Hickorn's economy will destroy him politically."

Ambassador Smithson spread his arms in amazement. "There you are, superintendent. I don't want to offend you or Bu or Tia, but frankly, none of you are seeing the noses in front of your faces. Fop Tia is evidence that democracy in Luong works. If he's personally dishonored, the gates of freedom are further battered. I've spoken to army commanders in the highlands. Good troopers, all of them. They've agreed to launch raids against Rouge positions once we've pinpointed the source of the counterfeiting. That should be the end of it, but in the meantime we have to keep a lid on it at this end."

Kiet visualized the highlands commanders and the lip service they surely paid to Smithson's request. They were too busy trafficking opium to risk casualties in quest of phantom laser printers. "On the outside chance that the, uh, hardware originated in Hickorn, Mr. Ambassador, who might handle it?"

"The only firm I know dealing in high tech of that nature is Tropics Office Products, Ltd., out of Singapore. They have no known connections with the Rouge."

"You have had transactions with them?"

"No. We can't buy durable goods of any kind locally. Sophisticated equipment comes to

us on requisition from State. I think Mayor Tia has bought from these people, though. A chap named Danny Blakelie is their regional manager here. I've met him. Competent and sincere, but a bit too breezy for my taste. Too much the salesman and hustler."

Kiet was tempted to ask if Danny Blakelie also wore leisure suits, but settled for his address.

**D**anny Blakelie lived and worked in a small villa in the International District, an enclave of wealthy Luongans and foreigners. The house was stucco, in a style described by cynics as French colonial chintz, with perimeter walls and a wrought-iron gate. It was modest compared to some of its neighbors, but unattainably elegant to the average Luongan, Kiet included.

Kiet unlatched the gate and went in. A Mercedes-Benz automobile was parked in the front courtyard. A small sign over the vestibule announced TROPICS OFFICE PRODUCTS, LTD. He rang the door chimes. No answer. He rang again, waited, then tried the door. It was unlocked.

Kiet entered what had once been a living room or a drawing room. It was now a showroom. Machines large and small, per-



forming functions known and unknown to Kiet, rested on floors of gleaming hardwood and on Oriental throw rugs. The larger units were free-standing, the smaller displayed on tables. If the merchandise was alien to Kiet, the brand names were not. Familiar logos of multinational corporations were well represented. European classical music wafted from hidden speakers. This was no sidewalk stall in the public market.

Kiet noticed that an end of the room had been partitioned into a business office. Its door was ajar and Kiet could see a pair of feet propped on a desk.

"Hello," he said.

No reply.

"Mr. Blakelie?"

Still no reply.

Kiet swung the door open and saw why the man casually lounging at his desk had not answered. He was seated in a swivel chair, arms akimbo. He had been shot in the face—what remained of it—several times. On the desk was a perforated pillow. Tiny feathers had adhered to the victim's coagulating blood. An impromptu silencer, Kiet thought. Mr. Danny Blakelie, regional manager, he presumed.

He took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and back-pedaled. Squeamishness at the sight of human gore was Bamsan Kiet's

darkest secret. The knowledge that blood and guts wrenched the stomach of Hickorn's top law enforcement officer would result in an irreparable loss of face.

When Kiet got his nausea under control, he telephoned Captain Binh and asked him to come over. He hoped he was speaking in a calm, measured, professional tone, but he couldn't be sure. That anxiety was worse than the discovery of the body itself.

By the time Binh arrived, Kiet had determined by ransacked cupboards and drawers in other rooms that the killer or killers had searched the villa. A back door leading to the alley was wide open. Binh examined the body, determined from wallet identification that it was indeed Danny Blakelie, and theorized that Kiet had interrupted a search in progress.

"I attended several autopsies in America, superintendent," he said. "I learned a lot about pathology as it applies to murder. Blakelie was killed less than an hour ago. There is no rigor mortis yet. And, see, the surface blood hasn't completely clotted."

Kiet's eyes were focused on a harmless point on the wall directly above Blakelie and the ghoulish Binh. "Of course. I no-

ticed that fact immediately.”

“The pillow muffled the gunshots, so it’s doubtful if neighbors heard them.”

“Agreed,” Kiet said, retreating subtly from the murder scene. “We will search thoroughly, on the hopeful assumption that my coming interrupted the search before it was completed.”

“Good,” Binh said, reaching for the telephone. “I’ll get a forensic team over and some detectives to canvass the neighborhood just in case.”

“No,” Kiet said. Binh’s “forensic team” would trample through, wasting department film and smearing fingerprint powder on everything. In the interest of professional harmony, he kept that reason to himself, but disclosed a more important one. “We’ll search first. I wish this crime to be our secret.”

“Superintendent—”

“Does anyone at headquarters know?”

“No. You ordered me here without explaining why. Your voice was strange, though. I suspected it was something major.”

“Captain, rumors and gossip in Hickorn travel like pollen.”

“Yes, I know, but the sooner we gather evidence and put out an APB, the better our chances of an arrest.”

Hickorn’s theaters featured

old American movies. Kiet visualized dragnets and roadblocks in a black and white world of Tommy guns and double-breasted suits. Naturally, the methods Binh had learned in the District of Columbia were more modern, the forensic teams and APB’s and whatnot, but the young adjutant’s zeal seemed universal with western detectives. “The evidence, the primary evidence, is what we are after. Do you have an axe in the trunk of your car?”

Binh, with a puzzled frown, nodded yes.

“Bring it, please. I thought I caught a whiff of new varnish in one of the bedrooms.”

The bedroom with the faint varnish odor was unusually small. Its built-in closet of stained and varnished teak resembled others in the villa, but there was a discrepancy in interior volume. Kiet suspected a wall of being false. It was solid and revealed no handles or buttons. He asked Binh to unlock the mystery with his axe.

Binh broke through and saw wires and cables and metal tracks. “It slides upward, superintendent,” he said excitedly. “It must be activated from elsewhere.”

Kiet assisted in pulling away the splintered wood. Inside was a photocopier, a paper cutter,

and two large cardboard boxes. The copy machine was on casters. They wheeled it into the bedroom and examined the boxes. One was filled with blank paper, the second with sheets of newly printed zin notes.

"Millions and millions of queer," Binh said in whispered awe. "If you had walked in twenty minutes later, this probably would have been gone."

Kiet plugged in the copier. "How do you activate the device?"

"Simple." Binh said. He took a thousand zin bill from his pocket, placed it in a slot, and pushed a button. After a minute of soft whirring and buzzing, a perfect duplicate centered on a sheet of paper was excreted into a tray.

"So simple," Kiet said, in amazement. "You merely cut it to size and spend it."

"Superintendent, my forensic specialists?"

"Patience," Kiet said, grunting as he lifted the box of counterfeit and dumped it on the bed. "First we count and collate."

"Count and collate?"

"Retrieve the paper cutter, please," Kiet said. "We'll also finish that chore for the late Mr. Blakelie."

**H**ickorn is situated between the equator and the Tropic of Cancer, at nineteen degrees north

latitude. In the tropics, there is no twilight. The word is not even in the Luongan vocabulary. When the sun sets, it is as if a light switch is flicked off.

By ten minutes to seven, the funny money was cut and arranged to Kiet's satisfaction. Out the bedroom window was blackness punctuated only by a distant street light. Kiet appreciated a symmetry in the timing he couldn't define.

He had sent Binh to Blake-lie's office for more rubber bands to secure the currency and Binh had returned, wrinkling his nose, saying, "Superintendent, putrefaction is occurring. May I call—"

Kiet cut him off with a hand wave, not wanting to hear details of the decomposition. "All right, what do we have? Eighty different serial numbers, *eight* different denominations. The five hundreds, thousands, two-, five-, and ten-thousands we've seen so frequently. And here, captain, a substantial stack of twenty-, fifty-, and hundred-thousand zin notes."

"I'd never seen a hundred-thousand before," Binh said, paying attention. "At the inflated rate, it's still worth one hundred American dollars."

"How much altogether, roughly?"

"In dollars, millions perhaps."

"Some of the, uh, queer is rec-

ognized for what it is when it's passed. I personally know this. Much more, however, filters into the economy. Quite an impact, I should think."

"You would have to be awfully greedy," Binh said.

Kiet had told Binh of his interviews with Minister Bu and Mayor Tia. "You would have to know that production has already been excessive and that the entire scheme was nearing its end. You would reluctantly agree, although you are unable to resist the temptation of a lucrative exit."

"I have it!" Binh said. "If Mayor Tia had conspired with Blakelie to print the queer and had been laundering it through his partners and his ward heelers to prop up his faltering commodities business and to provide a campaign chest, as you believe, and it had gone so far that inflation was causing his business and his public image to suffer, and Blakelie wouldn't stop, well, as far as I'm concerned that's sufficient motive for killing Blakelie."

Kiet attempted to digest Binh's soliloquy. America had taught him to summarize problems in vast, rapid-fire sentences. The reference to laundry was peculiar, a non sequitur no doubt the result of fatigue, but his conclusion was sound. Kiet gestured to Binh to pick up the box of rubber-banded queer.

"Splendid, captain. We shall lay a trap."

"Mayor Tia?"

"Yes. You and I will follow him."

"I can phone my forensic team?"

"Yes, but don't order them here."

"Then where, superintendent?"

"To Mr. Singh's tailor shop. Have them be there in one hour to discreetly guard him. The man is a swine but he does not deserve to die because of the imposition we are going to force on him."

Ninety minutes after Kiet's and Binh's visit to Bombay Tailors, Mayor Fop Tia's red convertible came out of his driveway like a bullet, gears grinding, smoke belching from the exhaust.

Binh waited until the mayor had turned a corner before making chase. "As you said, superintendent, pollen. Who, I wonder, informed him?"

Kiet shrugged. "Tia has stooges throughout Hickorn, all anxious to do a favor and have a scrap of graft tossed in their direction."

"He's leading us downtown," Binh said. "Toward his commodities business. His partners or employees. Any of them could have killed Blakelie for him."

"Perhaps."

"Then again, Singh's is en route."

"True, although—captain!"

Binh, lost in speculation, grazed a curbing. The Citroën lifted on two wheels, but fell back to the planet with a thud and a squeal of tortured rubber. Kiet closed his eyes and cinched his seat belt even tighter.

"Although what, superintendent?" Binh asked, calmly upshifting.

"What? Oh. The airport is a possibility."

"Fop Tia fleeing Hickorn," Binh said, shaking his head. "Why would he do that?"

"Uncertainty. Look, he's turning north."

"I can't believe it."

Kiet said nothing. Four kilometers later, Binh was forced to believe. Fop Tia stopped in front of Hickorn International Airport's stucco terminal, took a small suitcase from the trunk, and quickstepped inside.

"He's leaving his car in the loading zone. In effect, abandoning it," Kiet said.

When Tia was out of sight, Binh parked behind the convertible, and started out of the car.

"No, not yet," Kiet said.

"We can't let him get away, superintendent!"

"He won't. Hickorn International isn't the world's busiest airport. The only regular eve-

ning flight is the shuttle to Bangkok," Kiet said, glancing at his watch. "It doesn't take off for another hour. Boarding will begin in approximately thirty minutes. Tia will be busy buying his ticket and bribing the appropriate customs official to ignore his luggage."

"Why shouldn't we grab him now?"

"Grabbing, as you put it, a man of such prominence requires a certain delicacy and a sense of timing. Don't forget, captain, the man has power and influence. If there is a confrontation and airport security soldiers are summoned, we would be the losers."

Binh fidgeted, drumming the steering wheel. "I was so sure he'd lead us to whoever it was he hired to murder Blakelie."

"It was the most logical assumption."

Kiet lapsed into silence. Binh was too frustrated to break it. They sat. Twenty-five minutes passed. Kiet opened his door.

Binh sprang out and said, "The hands of my watch had lead weights tied to them."

"Mine too," Kiet admitted. "Please hurry."

An airline clerk was handing Fop Tia his boarding pass as the policemen approached. Tia wore an orange leisure suit and a Hawaiian shirt unbuttoned at the top. A gold chain was draped over a chubby, hairless chest.

The mayor ignited a politician's smile. "Well, Kiet. Are you flying somewhere?"

Kiet observed that the knuckles of the hand holding the suitcase were white. "No. And you, sir? Bangkok, is it?"

"A trade conference," Tia said evenly. "It's part of my job to encourage commerce, you know."

"If you have a minute, sir," Kiet whispered. "A matter of the greatest urgency."

"My flight—"

"We'll be brief. Please."

Tia rolled his eyes in exasperation, but permitted Kiet and Binh to steer him to a bench, a quiet area adjacent to the lockers. As Kiet had hoped, Tia was too rushed to argue and create a scene.

"This better be important, Kiet."

"I applaud your bravado," Kiet said. "You're a fine actor, but for a few minutes just listen. Your assassin or assassins did not betray you. They did not find the counterfeit zin after they killed Danny Blakelie. They did not deliver it to Mr. A. Singh and sell it to him for five percent of its face value. The contrivance was ours and Singh was happy to cooperate. If I hadn't made a lucky and timely arrival at Blakelie's villa, they would have done their loyal duty. They would—"

Tia laughed loudly. "Kiet,

I've always believed that you were too old for your job. Your arteries have hardened. Your brain is starved for blood."

"They would have," Kiet continued, "destroyed the copy machine and the currency."

Binh added, "Blakelie proposed a scheme and you jumped at it. You split fifty-fifty. You'd have money to compensate for the business reverses of your inept partners and funds for your upcoming campaign. Then Blakelie went berserk. He got too greedy. He passed the queer on his own and sent our economy into chaos. You had him killed to stop him."

"This boy of yours, Kiet," Tia said angrily, jabbing a plump finger at Binh's face, "has a disrespectful mouth. After I return from Bangkok, I'll call in some favors. I'll have *his* job, too. You can clean out your desks together."

The jabbing finger belonged to the hand that had been clutching the suitcase. Kiet slid the case between his legs, popped the latches with a pocketknife, and said, "Your return? In the next century, perhaps. You are traveling rather lightly."

"Give it to me."

"Underwear? A change of clothing? I am curious."

"Kiet!"

"How much U.S. money is inside, Mr. Mayor? A quarter of



a million? Half a million? Every dollar you gained in this venture? I am *very* curious. Let's dump it on the floor and count. When people here see what their mayor is taking to Bangkok, they may have as many questions as we do."

"No, Kiet, please. I'll make you a deal."

"A percentage of the proceeds from the sale of counterfeit zin? I don't think so, but I'll make you a deal. Tell me who you hired to kill Blakelie."

Fop Tia wiped perspiration from his forehead. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Liar!" Binh said.

"A secondary offer," Kiet said. "Catch your flight to Bangkok."

Tia brightened and reached for the suitcase. "A wise choice, Kiet."

Kiet did not release it. "The suitcase stays. Its contents will be donated to the Royal Treasury."

"You're bluffing," Tia said.

Kiet gave the suitcase to Binh. "Captain, would you care to litter the premises?"

"All right, all right," Tia said, standing. "You'll have your way."

"Splendid," Kiet said. "Allow us to escort you to your aircraft."

They walked Tia to his boarding ramp. Tia turned to Kiet as

he entered it and said, "With your department under me, Kiet, we could have done some good, profitable work together. Such an arrangement remains possible."

"Have a pleasant flight," Kiet said, not meaning it.

Binh and Kiet watched the jet take off and bank southward to Thailand. Binh said bitterly, "An accessory to murder is free. Does this mean that the case is closed?"

"Not at all, captain. Turn loose your full detection abilities and find the actual killer. With their patron gone, Tia's toadies and thugs will be standing in line to inform on one another. The—how do you say it in America?—the strike man?"

"Hit man."

"Yes, hit man. You should have numerous candidates soon."

They left the terminal and got into their car. "I still think Tia got off too easy," Binh said as they drove away.

"He didn't," Kiet said. "He lost his power. That's almost as precious to him as his freedom. Besides, Hickorn benefits mightily."

"How so?" Binh asked.

"She doesn't have to wait for her mayoral election. It must be held immediately and it might even be an honest one."

FICTION

# To Be Cold, Like Trees



by G.  
Wayne  
Miller

*Illustration by Karen Stolper*

38

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

**I** look at the trees outside my window and I think how many centuries they have survived, how many summers they have blossomed with life, how many Septembers they have worn fire, how many winters, like this winter, they have been skeletal and cold and perfectly . . .

... content.

I look across the empty street at the factory and I remember back so long to when it was alive, to when there were workers on all three shifts, and the parking lot was full, and chimneys spewed smoke, and lunch sirens blew, and the trucks and boxcars ringed it like a fortress under siege.

Now the factory is cold, like the trees, and shadowy, like the hills beyond, and black at night except for a single light some fool leaves on in an attempt to keep the vandals away. Down the street is an antique shop, and there are desks and chairs and rusting bed frames still piled on the front porch, but it is closed, too. The windows are boarded with plywood, and the weeds are wild and thick where once there was impeccable lawn.

Only the grocery still opens for business, weekdays nine to six, Saturdays nine to noon, as it has for over a century. Of course, they're going to close that, too. Hank McArthur, whose family's run it from the start, said so himself. Told me he's keeping his stock up only through the end of black powder season and then he's putting the for-sale sign up and moving over the mountains past the reservoir to Amherst, where, he assures me, times are better.

Why don't you come along? he said.

You could stay with me at my sister's until you find something of your own. She's got a mean tongue, Sis has, and she don't tolerate drinking, but you're no drinker anyways, so why not? You've got your Social Security and that's good anywhere a body chooses to be, so can you just tell me why not?

And I nodded my head, and said as how I would consider it, but I won't. There are still some things to do in this town. Still some whisperings I must pay attention to.

I stare at the trees tonight, and I look at the factory, and I remember something I read once in one of those glossy magazines before my eyes went bad. It was a story about how many H-bombs there are in the world today, and how many times over they could turn this planet into a radioactive graveyard, and how many people would die, and how many animals would be incinerated, and how many of God's lovely trees would be vaporized, and how long the

sky would remain the color and temperature of frozen charcoal.

I saw one of those bombs once.

It was lashed to an army flatbed and it was rolling through the Nevada desert in the middle of an armed convoy one Sunday evening late in 1947. I was a staff sergeant, and I was one of only a dozen guards with the necessary clearance to be out there on that range, and I had been sworn to secrecy, and I have kept that secret to this day. We hauled that thing off into the setting sun and the next morning at the crack of dawn there was a tremendous flash followed by a mushroom cloud and a sound like the devil himself announcing the end of the earth. Five or more miles away, the sagebrush and pine were reduced to ash. Three hours later, we could see traces of the cloud, still faintly shaped like a mushroom from an opium-eater's dream.

And I wanted to scream, but I didn't. Not out loud.

Today is Christmas Eve.

It's almost midnight now, almost the Savior's Day, and I sit here as I have nightly since summer, when the trees were so green. Outside, it is spitting snow. The wind is right, blowing, as it is, toward the reservoir that services two million people in a metropolitan area a hundred miles to the east. I suppose somewhere, probably over the hills there in Amherst, young children are dreaming their sugarplum dreams. The wind is not blowing their way, no, but toward the scientists and politicians and generals and industrialists whose existence is nourished by nightmares.

They call me, these Vermont trees.

I sit here in my bedroom, the window open, the factory fading in and out of the snow, and they call me. I cough blood again, and my whole body shakes, and my head feels deliciously light, my stomach painfully heavy, and I wonder once more if this disease that consumes my insides began that Monday morning in 1947, or if it started later, in the bowels of that factory, where we manufactured clothing out of asbestos.

Like all the others, this is an academic issue now.

I take another sip of codeine and I feel ready.

Soon, I am going to the cellar to remove from a wall safe the lead canister that has been hidden there so long. I will put on my winter coat then and step out into the night, loading the canister onto a child's rusted wagon I happened upon near the antique shop. Pulling that wagon, I will cross the street to the factory and go inside through a back door, the one closest to the hills and the

trees. After forty years, I know that door well. I will carry a flashlight and I will find my way down deep into the basement, a stuffy and fume-filled place where my little fire can get its best running start. I shall laugh at the absentee owner and his silly light, and I shall disarm the sprinklers by closing a valve the size of a grown man's skull. I will hum a nameless tune and I will pour kerosene everywhere through that rat-infested cellar and when I am ready to leave, I will drop a match. Kerosene burns much slower than gas, and I will be in no rush, no rush at all.

I shall climb.

I will use the back stairway, the one where I first kissed the young mill girl who became my wife and mother of my children, both of whom were stillborn. I will probably struggle with that canister, but I will make it to the top, I am sure. I will go to the middle of the roof, the place I expect the fire to be most fierce, the smoke most thick, and I will pry the top off that canister. For the first time since 1947, I shall see plutonium dust. There is almost a pound of it, and I am not ashamed to say it was stolen by me and a long-dead man of rank who had vague hopes of someday becoming rich or famous with it.

Then I will go to the edge, six granite and iron-beam stories high, and I shall check the wind one final time to be sure it is still blowing strongly toward the reservoir.

Then I shall breathe. Deep, long breaths, hale and hearty with the raw power of the new season. At last I shall sit, staring off into trees, and I shall wait, listening to the whispers:

*To be cold, like trees.*

*To be hot, like bombs.*



# Clara Cates and the Hatchett Murder

by  
**C. J. Watts**



I suppose every small town's got one and Gamble's Mill was no exception. Word had it there was a time Bowery Bill Hatchett was a halfway decent person, but as long as I could remember he'd been a nasty, bad-tempered, money-grubbing, foul-smelling old man and that's a fact. I don't know how

he got the name "Bowery" 'cause he wasn't no drinker. Old Bowery had two passions. One was money and the other was ways to get it.

Still, that don't give no cause to murder the man, does it?

His wife died about ten years afore he did. I remember her because she saved my life once



when Bowery's dog had me frozen plastered against the chain link fence of their yard. Bowery's had about five dogs since then and every one just as mangy and mean as the one that near had me for dinner. There he was, strainin' and snarlin' at the end of a long rusty chain hooked onto Bowery's truck and not two inches from my face. My mouth was as wide open as my eyes, but all that come out was these little squeaky noises. It seemed forever till Miz Hatchett come out, shakin' her head at us in this tired, faded-out fashion. She yanked that dog's chain and slammed him up in the truck. Then she half-carried me into their house. My legs felt like they was filled with tapioca pudding.

Their girls, Diane and Connie, was in the kitchen. Diane laughed at me and called me a chicken, but Connie was real nice, bringin' me a cup of half-sour milk.

Their whole house smelled sour, like mold and mildew and sweat all mixed together. There was books and newspapers stacked everywhere; piles of broke-up furniture, tools, dishes, and there was two dead squirrels on the table. Diane and Connie, when they come to school, smelled the same as that house. They got teased a

lot for that and for the funny unmatched clothes they wore.

After Miz Hatchett died, Bowery's place got to be a worse eyesore than ever. His girls grew up hard, but they were both pretty smart. Diane left town the day of graduation, swearing never to return, so Connie was left to cook Bowery's meals and clean as much as was possible. Her spare time was spent at the library, and more than once Bowery had come to fetch her there, hollerin' for his dinner or for some scrap of a receipt he'd like as not have in his shirt pocket.

Bowery got most of his things at auctions or garage sales, pickin' stuff up in that rattletrap of a truck with his dog on the seat beside him or in the bed behind. Every Saturday you'd find him at the County Fairgrounds Flea Market. Sometimes he had new stuff to sell as well as old, and word was that Bowery had more than once been caught selling stolen property. Whether that was true or not, he was never arrested. He was near arrested once when he was a young man working for Zane's Electronics. I never heard much about it... only that Bill Hatchett had been asked to leave the firm and after that became Bowery Bill, the man just near everyone in town had been cheated by.

Besides what he made at his flea market business, Bowery owned land all over Gamble's Mill and was part owner of an auto salvage yard. And everyone in town knew about Bowery's coin collection. His coins was the only thing Bowery never sold.

Shrewd as he was, though, Bowery could also be a fool. Once the state lottery began, Bowery would buy up to a hundred dollars a week in tickets. Sometimes he won, but more often he didn't, and his girls wearing funny clothes and eating squirrel for lunch.

My only real run-in with Bowery was when our daughter Susie tried to collect for her paper route. Every week she'd go out to the flea market to collect, and every week it was something. He wasn't paying for Monday 'cause the paper got rained on. He wasn't paying for Thursday 'cause his dog chewed it up. I was not about, under no circumstances, to allow Susie to go into his yard so's she could get the paper on the porch. I still shudder every time I back up to a chain link fence and it would be a real handicap in life for Susie, never being able to read a paper without being traumatized. So it ended up me and Cloyd paid for Bowery's stupid paper, although I think Cloyd would have liked to de-

liver it right up his nose.

Cloyd is like that. Mostly he's just a gentle, lovable guy, but he sees someone big and mean picking on someone small and weak and you don't want in his way. There are jerks who don't even know they're jerks and you just kind of let it go . . . which Cloyd has to do a lot working as a mechanic in general aviation. But when there are deliberate jerks, like them people who give waitresses a hard time on purpose, or them people like Bowery who set out figurin' to cheat a person, then Cloyd can get to fuming till you can't hardly stand him.

I tend to be more what they call passive-aggressive. I'm a fulltime wother (that's a word I invented for wife and mother). I'm also a writer and I guess you could say a part-time detective. I'm definitely a part-time housekeeper, although there have been days I'd rather give this house away than keep it . . . like when the minister comes calling and you're standing in two feet of clutter.

Cloyd was in one of his fuming moods Labor Day, the day Bowery died. Henry Zane had give him a letter and a check for only half of what he owed on some fabric work Cloyd had done on his glider. He said Cloyd had took too long, like he

knew something about it! So Cloyd was out chopping wood, which is what he always does, (or what I always send him to do) when he's really mad. Henry Zane, is president of Zane's Electronics and has always been something or other in the city government. In fact, his last political move was to announce for mayor. He promised he would see to it that Gamble's Mill would get a new shopping mall. There had been a lot about it in the paper, the main problem being location. According to the city planners, the best place for it was Bowery's land on the outskirts of town. But Bowery wasn't havin' any. Everyone in town knew he hated Henry Zane and always had. Frankly, I think they were birds of a feather myself. Only Henry Zane dressed and smelled better.

Anyway, on Labor Day I was wading through the clutter, baking brownies for a class reunion we was to go to that afternoon. I was not in the best mood myself, as someone had left the lid loose on a bottle of syrup and when I picked it up it spilled. I stood there hollerin' with the lid in my hand and Aunt Jemima in my fuzzy slipper. There was a big puddle on the floor and our son Roy was chasin' the dog Disney around the house 'cause she'd walked through

the puddle and now was tearing around the house with fur balls and gum wrappers and half a comic book on her feet. I felt sure the minister would show up any second and it's a wonder I didn't burn the brownies while I cleaned up the mess.

By the time Cloyd come in, he'd cut enough wood for three months and was none too excited about going to the reunion.

"We got to go, Cloyd. We said we would, and besides I told Molly she couldn't go to the Labor Day parade with her friends. Now all her friends have gone and she'll be madder than . . ."

"Where is she now?"

"Either in the bathroom or on the phone. I swear if we was to ever have a phone in the bathroom we'd never see that girl."

"These brownies are good, honey. You make them from scratch?"

"Sure did. Took the box outta the cupboard and scratched myself with it. It'll be fun seeing everyone again."

"I suppose so," he said, sounding more like he was going to a hanging. "Clara, why's the dog have socks on her feet?"

"That was Roy's idea. You get over your mad?"

"I tell you what, I ain't never gonna do nothing again without something being written up. Handshake ain't worth squat

any more. Sending his secretary out with that letter! I ain't been cheated this bad since me and Jackie Perkins worked for Bowery Bill out at the junkyard . . . why'd you let Roy put socks on the dog?"

"Mary Lou Hobbit says if they don't get Bowery's place for the shopping mall they might try to get the auto salvage."

"Mary Lou Hobbit says a lot of things. Besides, Jackie may run that place, but you can bet Bowery's still got his hand in. Them's my socks you know."

"Yeah, I know, and if you keep eating brownies like that I'm going to have to stop by the market and buy potato salad for the reunion."

Which is exactly what I ended up doing.

**C**lass reunions are funny things. It's like you want to see everyone, but you ain't at all sure you want everyone to see you. Cloyd seemed particularly concerned about his dunlap. (A dunlap is when you get this roll of fat around your middle and it dunlaps over your belt.) I got one, too, but I got four kids and stretch marks to use as an excuse. 'Course, when I saw Chantilly Adams, I near gagged. That girl's got seven kids and the same figure she had in high school, which don't seem proper

somehow. But most people there was normal like we was and we had a fun time talking and playing volleyball and feeding our dunlaps.

It was about three thirty when this long sleeky-looking car pulled up and Diane Hatchett stepped out. Her name was Akers now, and her husband owned a construction firm and her kids wasn't able to come as they had been invited to go sailing off the eastern shore of Maryland, and she was herself employed by a prestigious real estate firm in Cincinnati. I put that all in one sentence and I know it's right because she told me all about it all afternoon. It would have been impressive if she hadn't told it a dozen times and I suppose I shoulda been happy for her. Instead I kept getting a perverse pleasure out of thinking how her expensive designer clothes didn't match.

About four o'clock, Marge's Cab delivered Diane's husband to the reunion. He'd had a meeting in town. Chuck Akers was short and stocky and tanned with no dunlap. He didn't say a whole lot, mainly because Diane didn't let him, but he struck me as kind of the hard-butt macho type and I'm sure I seen him come on to Chantilly Adams at least once.

I was inside the hall changing the baby's diaper and Diane

was telling me (again) about her house and about how if some major deal went through she would be the top-gun seller in the firm and win a trip to the Bahamas. She finally paused for a breath and I asked her if she'd seen her family.

She got this really irritated look on her face and said, "I saw Connie this morning. I don't intend to see the old man."

"So, how's Connie doing?"

"The same. Same as Mama. Stubborn and stupid like she owes that #/%#&\*% something! She says she's got a boyfriend, but truth is she won't never leave Bowery. And even if she would, that Stephan Taylor won't give her nothing but more work and worry. He's as big a fool as his daddy."

"Stephan Taylor . . . the guy who owns the used bookstore? I didn't know they were seeing each other."

Diane snorted. "If you call a trip to the library or a picnic by the river a date. Connie is one fool person and always has been. She's gonna wind up dead like Mama."

"Seems to me we'll all wind up that way."

"Yeah, but I'm going in style, honey. I intend to see things and do things and buy what I want when I want it. And I'm good at what I do, Clara, you can believe it. I can sell a house

for more than it's worth and buy property for less than it's worth and that's why I'm top gun. That's business. That trip is mine. You wait and see."

"Well, Diane," I picked Ellie up into my arms. "You sure are your daddy's girl, ain't you?"

For once she didn't say nothin' at all. I left her there to go find Cloyd and the kids.

It was about ten minutes afterwards that the sheriff's deputy, Harley Snodgrass, showed up. He talked to Diane, who left right away with Chuck, and then he come over to where me and Cloyd and some others were sitting. Sheriff Jerry Bridger is all right, but he's got some deputies who all have substantial dunlaps. I've noticed that in a lot of small towns. Maybe they only got one size uniform or something. Anyway, Harley come lumbering over and told us Bowery Bill had shot himself in the woods with his own .22.

"Shot the back of his head clean off." Harley grabbed some chips and stuffed them in his mouth, hitching what looked to be a belt. "Hey, Chantilly! How you doin', darlin'? You shoulda seen Connie when I told her. Went near wild, knocking things over and screaming at me. Woulda hit me, I think, if that Taylor fella hadn't stopped her. That Diane now, she just didn't say nothing. Hard as flint, that

one." He asked for some coffee and sat down. He give a great big sigh and a little bit of a belch and told us he had the situation under control.

"Yeah, as I tole Bridger, Bowery probably got fed up with livin' with hisself, but it coulda been an accident. Knocked his brains clean outta his head. Man, this spaghetti salad is good! You make this, Chantilly? We ain't found where he parked his truck yet. Ain't found Black neither, so you all best keep your kids close on. That dog is mean. Don't you worry, though. We'll get him."

How one man could talk and eat so much at the same time was a sight to see.

We was driving home and I was staring out the window thinking about Bowery Bill. The kids were wore out even beyond arguing with each other, so I had the time to think.

"You know," I said, "I seen Bowery buy a dozen lottery tickets just yesterday for that drawing last night. Don't seem a man who was plannin' to kill himself would do that."

"Maybe he wasn't plannin' it," said Cloyd, "or maybe it was an accident like Harley said."

"Don't see how someone could trip and shoot the back of his head off."

Cloyd give me this sidewise look and opened his mouth.

Then he just shut it again and shook his head.

It was quiet a good minute.

"Seems mighty convenient," I mused.

Cloyd sighed.

"I mean, now the girls will probably sell that property for the shopping center. You know what I mean?"

"I know exactly what you're meanin', and Clara, I'm telling you to keep out of it. If Bowery was murdered, you got no part in it. This ain't figurin' out who's been dipping into the VFW treasury or which clerk has been wearin' merchandise home from the Shoe Biz. This ain't even solving a fifty-year-old murder case. Them things are safe. This ain't and you got no part in it."

I nodded out the window and was quiet some more.

"Diane will probably go to the Bahamas now. . . ." I looked at Cloyd and shut up.

**R**oy was practicin' his karate in the back yard, Susie was at a friend's, Ellie was napping, Molly was on the phone, and Cloyd was fast asleep five minutes into his fishing show. I went for a walk. I was thinking the used bookstore would have an Agatha Christie I ain't read yet.

There was a "closed" sign on the door, but Stephan Taylor

come when I knocked. He was a tall, gangly guy with glasses and an Adam's apple as big as your fist. He seemed relieved to see me.

"Can you come in, Mrs. Cates? It's Connie . . . she's . . . I didn't know if I should call someone or . . . I didn't know . . . please, come in." He stepped aside and promptly banged his elbow on the doorframe.

Connie was sitting in Stephan's back room sobbing and pounding on the table.

"Oh, Clara!" She grabbed me. "They're like vultures! I can't take this no more! There's people out at the house stopping and staring and Diane's inside . . ."

I give her a hug and scrubbed my hand up and down her back. "Stephan, why don't you fix us all a cup of tea?"

He nodded and begun fumbling around at the counter.

"Clara, I didn't mean it!" Connie sobbed. "I didn't want this to happen."

Stephan dropped a spoon that went clattering across the room. He picked it up, bangin' his head on the table, and then stood up. The teakettle was commencin' to sing.

"Uh . . . Connie, maybe I should go back. I'll make sure they don't take anything." He stood there, indecisive, sort of flappin' his arms. "I mean, I

probably should . . ." He turned around, slammed the singing teakettle off the burner and just stood there with his hands on the counter, staring down.

Connie took a deep breath. "Maybe you should."

Stephan turned and looked at her and there was something queer and sad in both their eyes. Stephan just near tore out of there.

I made the tea. Connie sat quiet now, staring far away. It scared me.

"Connie?" I put the tea in front of her.

She didn't answer. It was like she wasn't there.

"Connie Hatchett!" I barked at her.

She looked at me. "He's gone, ain't he? It don't matter." She leaned forward staring at me hard.

I had no idea what to say.

She lounged back in her chair and waved her hand in the air. "Diane's at the house with Chuck." Her voice had a faded, washed-out tone. "They're looking for Bowery's treasure. Bowery didn't believe in banks. They think I know."

She stopped and narrowed her eyes at me, suspicious like. "I don't know where it is! They'll all be looking for it. It don't matter." She give a weird giggle.

"You want to lie down?"



"That's it, put me to bed, Clara. Maybe I'll be lucky and die in my sleep."

As soon as I got her in bed I called my cousin Sara Jo Cooper to come and sit with her while I went over to Bowery's. Sara Jo's a nurse and just about the sweetest person I know. She would know whether Connie needed a doctor or not. That girl sure was scaring me.

Bowery's place looked like a carnival freak show with people standing and staring as if the place just now dropped out of the blue and ain't been here right along. Stephan was inside the fence doing his best to keep folks out. When he saw me, he come forward, worry all over his face.

"Where's Connie?"

"I got a nurse watching her. She'll sleep now. Is Diane still here?"

His face got stony. "Yes. She and Chuck are tearing the house up looking for Bowery's treasure. I keep telling people to go home. Look at this! All you need is someone selling cotton candy." He looked at me, totally frustrated. "Can you do anything about this?"

"No, but here comes someone who might."

Sheriff Jerry Bridger's car pulled up to the curb. In a few minutes he had people on their way. Then he come over to

where Stephan and I were standing.

"Hello, Clara, Taylor." He touched the brim of his hat. "Now, Clara, why ain't I surprised to see you?" He suggested we go sit up on the porch. From inside we could hear the sounds of Diane and Chuck's ongoing search for treasure.

Sheriff Bridger leaned against the porch railing and worked a toothpick in his mouth. "A lot of excitement for our little town, ain't it? Shoot, there hasn't been a murder in Gamble's Mill since my daddy was in office." His voice had a slightly injured tone.

Stephan and I looked at each other.

"It *was* murder, then," I said.

"Sure was. Man would have to be a contortionist to shoot himself the way Bowery was shot. Besides, we found his dog. Fire department was called out for a ditch fire on 622. Found Black there, half-burned. Sloppy job, whoever done it. Dog'd been shot with a .22. Probably Bowery's. Yessir, a real sloppy job." A click come out of the corner of his mouth. "Killer musta been in a hurry, nervous. Wouldn't you say, Taylor?"

Stephan jumped about three feet.

Jerry paid him no mind and just went on talking. "Haven't found Bowery's truck yet.

Shame, too. Jackie Perkins just put one of them sliding glass windows in the back of the cab."

There was a crashing sound from inside the house.

"Lord, sheriff, sounds like they're taking the walls down in there," I said.

"They're looking for Bowery's treasure," said Stephan.

"Bowery's treasure ain't no good to him now, is it?" Sheriff Bridger looked lazily at Stephan. "You been doin' any looking yourself?"

"No! I swear!"

"Where were you this afternoon?"

"At the store."

"Store was closed for the holiday."

"I know. I had some, uh, paperwo . . . I had some things to do."

"I bet you did. See my deputy leaning against the car, there? Mind if he has a look in the glove box?"

"But why?" Stephan's Adam's apple went up and down a few times like a yo-yo.

"Just a call we had about a '77 Cutlass. You got an objection?"

"Well . . . no, but . . ." Stephan fumbled in his pocket. "It's locked. I better uh . . ." he looked at the sheriff quizzically. "I better . . . uh?" He turned, tripping, toward the car.

"Jerry, I know he looks and acts guilty as sin, but that's just how he acts. Was the call anonymous?"

"It was." Jerry stood up. "Looks like they found what we was looking for."

Bowery Bill's wallet had been in Stephan Taylor's glove box. Stephan was taken away for questioning.

Jerry offered me a ride home, but I told him I'd rather walk. Fact is, that's when I do my best thinking, and there was a whole lot about this case smelled awful fishy. In the first place, Stephan was so nervous and clumsy it appeared to me he'd have a hard time killing anyone. And Bowery Bill was no slouch when it come to strength, and paranoid enough to always be on his guard against anyone. And there was Black. If Bowery didn't get you, his dog would. In the second place, everything seemed a bit too got up to be real. A sloppy job, just like shooting and then trying to burn the dog.

I was still about half a mile from home when it commenced to rain. First, big fat drops of warning and then buckets. I was soaked to the skin in a few seconds. I begun to run.

From behind me I heard the theme from *Star Wars* and turned to see Jackie Perkins in his jeep.

"Hey there, Clara! You look somewhat wet. Wanna lift?"

"Hey, Jackie!" I plopped down on the seat beside him. "Ow!" There was something caught in my hair that hurt and if you ever seen the head of bushcurl I got you'd know it was no laughing matter.

'Course that's exactly what Jackie was doing. "Hold still," he giggled. "I'll get you loose."

It was a fishhook from one of the poles Jackie had hanging on the rack behind us.

"I been fishing. You the biggest thing I caught all day." He giggled again. He really had an annoying giggle.

"Ain't funny, Jackie. Hey, what'd you do to your arm?"

He kept disentangling. "Ah! Burned it last night welding. Happens all the time." He finally got me loose and grinned at me. He's a short, wiry guy with crinkly eyes and a grin made all the more bigger by the fact he had hardly no hair at all and hadn't since he was about twelve.

"Like the horn?" he asked. "Listen to this."

He flicked a switch and pressed the horn and the *Lone Ranger* theme commenced.

"Heigh-ho!" Jackie shouted as he tore down the road. I begun to wonder if pneumonia wasn't more welcome than being in a car with Jackie. He was

tearin' through the thunderstorm more engrossed in his stupid horn than in where he was going. He had a whole symphony of tunes on that thing in all sorts of rhythms and volumes. All around us cars was braking and slowing down as their drivers rubbernecked to see who it was that was playing the music. We near hit several.

"Where you been, anyway?" he shouted over the Notre Dame fight song. "Ain't exactly weather for a stroll."

"Oh, I been out to Bowery's," I shouted back.

"Bowery's! What in the world you want with him?"

I stared. "Ain't you heard about Bowery?"

The music was finally fading away. "What, the land deal? I don't care what you said to him, he just ain't gonna sell. I ain't either, with him owning twenty percent of the business. That old man has been cheating me since the week me and Cloyd worked for him back in high school."

"That old man has been killed."

Jackie swerved the jeep dangerously close to a ditch and stopped.

"That ain't funny, Clara."

I felt insulted. "I ain't trying to be funny, Jackie. Bowery Bill was shot today with his own

Jackie's crinkly eyes got serious and a low whistle came out of his mouth. "What do you know about that. Shoot, I been up to the lake fishing all day. Bowery Bill dead." He whistled again. "What do you know about that?"

"I wish I knew more about it," I said, holding onto the dash as Jackie swerved back onto the road.

"Seems like now I'd like to take some of the things I've said about him back," Jackie said. "Why do you suppose that is? He *was* a crook and a cheat. Bet Connie wishes the same thing."

"You mean Diane, don't you?"

Jackie looked vacant for a second. "Diane who? Oh, the older one. No, I mean Connie. I heard her tell him just yesterday she wished he was dead."

"Where was this?"

"Out at the convenience store. Mary Lou Hobbit heard it, too. Bowery was yelling something at Connie about where had she been and how if she was gonna slum around she'd never see a dime of his money. And then Connie . . ." Jackie whistled and shook his head. "Man, that girl *screamed*! She told Bowery she didn't care about his money and he couldn't hurt her no more. You know what that old man did?" Jackie's tone got angry. "He *laughed*. You know that laugh he's got. And then

he said, 'Can't hurt you no more, huh? Then why you cryin'?' It was then she screamed she wished he was dead and got in her car and drove off. And today he's shot dead in the woods. What do you know about that."

Connie's words come back to me: "Clara, I didn't mean it!" That's what she'd said and then later that empty-acting way, that wish that she was dead. I shivered.

"You cold, huh? You best get some clothes on . . . I mean dry ones." Jackie giggled as he pulled up our lane. "Tell Cloyd hey for me, hear?"

I ran up to the porch with the sounds of squealing tires and the theme from *The Raiders of the Lost Ark* to announce my entrance.

Cloyd and me don't fight, we more often sulk. The way he was slamming cupboards to make supper for the kids I knew he was none too pleased with me. So I went to take a shower and thought about the case. I come out to find Cloyd folding clothes, handling them like they was the most disgusting socks and sheets in the world.

"You want a cup of tea?" I asked.

"No."

"It's time for *Fisherman's Tale*. You want I should turn it on?"

He shrugged, peering at Roy's underwear with his lips tight.

"You know," I said, "I don't believe them fishing shows anyways. I think they got trained bass." I laughed tentatively.

He kept studying underwear.

"You know, they catch the same one over and over and say, 'Hey there, Melvin, you got a beauty.' Why else would they throw it back, ha ha."

He didn't say nothin' and it was quiet. (Why is it kids never interrupt you when you wish they would?)

"Jackie Perkins went fishing today up at the lake . . ." I took a deep breath. "And I went fishing over to Bowery Bill's when you'd asked me not to and I'm sorry."

He finally glanced at me.

"Not that I *did* it. Only that I did it the way I did it."

He went back to his laundry. I begun to help.

"Look at this shirt of Roy's! The Goodwill wouldn't have it. Molly needs another trottin' harness and goodness knows I need some nightgowns. This blue one here, the elastic's all out of it. I wore it nursing Susie . . . wasn't she a pig! And this here one has been so comfortable I near hate to throw it out." I wiggled it under his nose.

He looked at it and then at

me. I held it up against me.

He went to searching something safe. Molly's gym suit.

I grabbed his hand. "Cloyd, I love you and you love me and you knew what I was like afore you married me. I can't help trying to help. I can't help being curious . . ."

"Nosy."

"Nosy, then." I sighed and then wagged the nightgown at him like a bullfighter.

He rolled his eyes and then commenced to grin.

"Olé?" I raised my eyebrows.

"Olé!" he said, and pounced.

Was then the kids come in with an assortment of problems.

**I**t wasn't long after that that Jerry Bridger called to tell me Connie Hatchett had come in to confess to killing her father.

"She ain't sayin' much, Clara, but she knew a whole lot more about how and where he was killed than Stephan Taylor did. I sent her home tonight, but I gotta book her tomorrow."

"And you don't want to, right?"

"Don't matter what I want and don't want. Her prints are on the rifle along with Bowery's and some we can't identify. Not Taylor's. Thing is, she's diggin' herself in deep. I'd just like you to talk to her, that's all."

"You figure she confessed to get Stephan off the hook?"

"Looks like it, more's the shame. He wasn't much on the hook. Complete bust on any details."

"Okay, I'll see her early tomorrow."

I felt cold inside for Connie Hatchett. She'd been a martyr most of her life and now couldn't shake the habit. She was in some real danger.

As I went downstairs, I could hear voices on the porch and found Cloyd talking to Henry Zane.

Henry Zane was a great big man who seemed to fill up any space he occupied. He had an engaging smile and a way about him that had let him get away with a lot of things. He could cheat somebody and they'd end up thanking him for it.

Well, not me, I thought, as he stood up and smiled.

"Good evening, Mrs. Cates! I was just telling Cloyd I took the glider out yesterday. He did a fine job."

"Couldn't tell it by what you paid him."

"Clara . . ." Cloyd begun.

"No, Cloyd, this man flat out cheated you! And now he comes along with his runnin' for mayor face . . ."

"Now, see here . . ." Henry Zane started.

"No, you see here. Cloyd

worked hard getting that stupid glider in shape. Give up his fishing and, well, I just hope some moles come along and eat it!"

"Clara!" Cloyd near shouted it. He did not seem to be entering into the spirit of things.

"What!" I shouted back.

"Mr. Zane come along to pay the rest of what he owed me."

I swung to face Henry Zane and swung back to face Cloyd. There was not a thought in my head.

"It was a mistake," Zane said. "You see, I'd had some decorating work done at the office and the job was poorly done. Somehow," he gave a slight laugh, "my secretary got confused. When I mentioned 'fabric work,' she thought I meant the glider."

Sure and the pope's Jewish, I thought. On the surface of it I knew I should apologize but I'd sooner choke on a bone.

He was still talking, saying as he'd be outraged too and I had every right to be upset. Then he begun talking about Bowery Bill's death and what a monkey wrench that threw into plans for the shopping center.

"It's all very sad, really. Diane is more than willing to sell, but Connie seems confused right now." He shook his head and gazed for a moment at the floorboards. Then, like he'd just got



an idea, he jerked his head up and looked me square in the eye.

"Clara, do you love this town?"

"Sure I do."

"Do you know that a shopping mall will provide jobs for the people of this town? It will attract customers from a three county area and will enhance the real estate market. Darn it, Clara!" he swapped his hand in the air like he was catchin' a mosquito. "I love this town! And I hate to see one little confused girl stop its progress!" His eyes was just to the brim with tears and he stood his full height. Cloyd and me just stared.

"And you," he pointed a finger at me, "may be the only person she'll listen to. You may be the *one* person who holds the fate of Gamble's Mill in your hands."

With that, he turned and strode into the night.

I turned and looked at Cloyd.

"Pears to me someone ought to sing the national anthem about now," he said.

When we went back in the house I called Granny Cates.

"Granny? This is Clara. Listen, you know Miz Stella Morgan, don't you? Yes, well, you know how she worked for old man Zane about forty years? I was wondering if you could call on her and get her thoughts on that time Bill Hatchett worked

there and was let go. Yeah, I understand that. Try and catch her when she's fadin' in. Bye-bye."

Cloyd and me agreed we'd had a full day of it and went to bed.

Next morning after dropping Ellie off at Granny Cates' and the other kids off at school, I went out to see Connie Hatchett. When I walked in the kitchen, I groaned inside. Diane was there, too.

"Clara," she said, "can you talk some sense into this girl? She says she won't sell under no conditions."

Connie looked like a piece of cloth that'd been through the wringer once too often.

"I'd rather talk to her about confessing to Bowery's murder."

Diane swore contemptuously. "That ain't never gonna stick! But if we don't agree to sell within the next few days, we may lose the chance of a lifetime here."

"Ain't you afraid to sell just yet?" Connie asked faintly. "We ain't found the treasure."

"Chuck's out in the yard digging. Besides, we'd have a couple of months before construction actually began. I'm not even sure there is much treasure. Probably spent it all on lottery tickets or something. You're just like Mama. Never seeing

him for what he was. Believing that story he was framed . . . ”

“He had got proof!” Connie’s voice rose, then faded. “Last month. He told me.”

“So, why didn’t he use it? And you want to know something, sissy? If you ask me, the cops had the right man the first time. If you ask me, it was your precious Stephan that killed him. Looking for that stupid precious penny of his.”

“Albany Church Token.”

Stephan was at the door. “It was in my family since it was minted. My dad sold it and yes, he lost a bundle . . . to pay some medical bills. It’s no secret I came to buy it back, but it’s not that important now. Connie?” He held out his hand. At first I thought she would just sit there, but then she stood and took his hand, kinda collapsing against him.

“Maybe it’s not Connie you should talk to at all,” he said to me. “Maybe you should talk to Diane.”

“Mel!” Diane shouted.

“I did some checking. It’s Diane’s real estate firm that’s trying to buy this land to develop. And Chuck has his bid in for the construction.”

Stephan led Connie out to the back yard.

“So what!” Diane looked at me defiantly and shrugged.

“So, with the old man out of

the way, you sell the land, keep the profit, *and* get your top-gun rating in the firm. That’s a sweet deal, Diane, not to mention Chuck’s possible construction contract.”

Diane’s face was contorted with hate. She called me a name that I ain’t gonna write down. (There’s times I wish profanity rotted teeth.) I decided I best get out of there.

Connie told me she’d confessed to shield Stephan and now she regretted it. She knew where Bowery had been killed and how because Harley Snodgrass had been flappin’ his gums. Her prints were on the rifle because she would sometimes carry it in from the truck after Bowery had been hunting.

“The thing I don’t understand is that other set of prints,” she said. “I know how particular Papa was about that gun. We could all be in rags, but his dog was fed, his truck run good, and his gun was always cleaned and loaded. If I go to prison, will Diane be able to sell the property?”

“You’re not going to prison,” said Stephan. “Right, Clara?”

“I’ll do everything I can to see that don’t happen, but it wouldn’t be a bad idea to get a lawyer.”

Stephan walked me to the car and begun saying the very things I’d been thinking.

"She can't go to jail! Diane was right about one thing. I did hate that old man. First for how he cheated my dad and how he wouldn't sell me the coin. But once I met Connie . . ." his voice broke, "then it was more for the way he treated her. And the thing is, it hasn't stopped. He's still hurting her from the grave."

He stopped and then paced, tripping once over his shoelace. It was like he was talking to his hands. Finally he flopped them against his side and turned on me. "I just can't believe this is happening! It's crazy!" His voice was angry. He grabbed my arms. "I mean, figure it! Can you imagine *Connie* following her father into the *woods*, getting the gun, and then *shooting* him? Can you?" He shook me a little.

I assured him I couldn't and he let me go.

"*Then!*" He flapped his hands, looking a little bit like he was trying to take off. "*Then* she shoots the dog, takes his wallet and puts it in the glove box of my car! I mean that's stupid! If she wanted to make it look like a burglary, she could have hid that wallet a dozen other places."

"Shut up, Stephan!" I near slapped him.

He stared at me and I held my hand up, shushing him. It was something he said . . . there was something out of focus. As Granny Cates says, something

"cattywampus" about something somewhere.

But I couldn't get it. Not until after I said goodbye to Stephan and started home. Not until it commenced to rain.

When I got to Granny Cates' to pick up Ellie, she was all set to tell me about the deal that had got Bowery fired. She'd got it right from Miz Morgan's mouth.

"I want to hear all about it, Granny, but I ain't got time right now."

"But, Clara, Stella says there was a lot wasn't right about it. Henry talked his father out of bringing charges against Bowery. Now don't *that* tell you something?"

"Yeah, it does," I said, stuffing Ellie's arm into a sleeve, "but when Bowery was shot, Henry Zane was glad-handing it down at the Labor Day parade. He may be a crook, but he ain't the killer. You know something? I sorta wish he was."

I called Jerry Bridger soon as I got home and found out he was in court and probably couldn't be reached for another hour. I left a message and begun to pace. It was when I started flapping my arms like Stephan that I decided I had best move on this myself. Ellie didn't have no objection.

Then I made one more phone call and there was no answer. Seemed I might already be too late.

I think the good Lord must work overtime on fools like me, 'cause I'd barely got down the lane when Cloyd come drivin' up the road. He parked the truck and got in the car.

"So, where are you two off to? McDonald's?"

"I'll tell you on the way."

He tried to talk me out of it, but I couldn't believe we was in any danger.

"He shot Bowery."

"Yeah, well, I've thought about that," I said. "I think it was done sudden-like in the truck. Bowery's gun was loaded and hangin' on the rack. Member, it was the back of Bowery's head. They was sittin' in the truck and Bowery must have said something or laughed that laugh of his . . ."

"So, that's pretty desperate, ain't it? Wait till we get Jerry."

"He's in court, I told you."

"Then how about Harley Snodgrass?"

I snorted. "Harley!"

"He's got a gun, ain't he?"

"Yeah, and he shot himself in the foot with it once, too."

Jackie had an apartment above the office of the auto salvage and when we pulled in I could see a curtain move aside.

Ellie was fast asleep in her

seat and we decided to leave her in the car.

"Hope she stays asleep," I said.

"Hope she ain't an orphan tomorrow," said Cloyd.

Was then, standing in that rain, that I looked at his face and there was no joking about it. This was stupid, he was right. And another thing. I was feeling panic-scared all of a sudden.

"Cloyd, let's go. Come on." I grabbed his arm.

The door flew open. "Hey there, Clara, you gettin' all wet again! Hey, Cloyd! C'mon in."

Jackie Perkins couldn't be the killer, I decided, looking at his smiling face.

But when I saw the luggage, I knew I was right. Cloyd saw it, too. I felt him squeeze my arm.

"Goin' fishing again, Jackie?" he asked.

Cloyd's voice sounded so normal. I didn't dare open my mouth. I could feel those little squeaky noises in my throat.

"Yeah, takin' a week off this time. Business ain't exactly boomtown." He laughed, but it was high-pitched.

"What can I do for you?"

"Well," Cloyd paused. "I bought a truck over at Sulphur Springs. It's a '63 Ford. Needs a front brake drum."

"Sixty-three, huh. No, can't

say I got one of them out here."

"You sure? Now, ain't that funny. I thought I seen one here just yesterday."

"Nope, ain't got one. Tell you what." He stood. "I'll call around . . ."

"That was what Bowery drove, wasn't it?"

"What?"

"A '63. Bowery drove a '63 Ford. Fact is, I thought it was Bowery's truck at first."

Jackie didn't say nothin' a second. He just fiddled with the straps on the satchel. Then he shook his head. "Too bad about Connie, ain't it?" he asked.

"She didn't do it, Jackie," I said. My voice sounded a lot more normal than I felt. "The other day when you picked me up there was two things wrong about what you said. First, you said Connie got in *her* car and drove off. Connie don't have a car. It was Stephan's car she was using when you heard her screaming at Bowery. When you put Bowery's wallet in the glove box, the car was parked in front of Stephan's store."

"Put the wallet in . . . what the . . . what you talkin' about, Clara?" His eyes were wide and a bit too unbelieving.

"And the other thing is, I told you Bowery was shot, but I didn't tell you where. You told me about Connie screaming at him and then you said, 'And to-

day he's shot dead in the woods.' I never told you he was in the woods, Jackie. You knew he was 'cause you shot him."

Jackie blank-stared at us and then laughed, rolling his eyes.

"You crazy, girl!" he shouted.

I could feel Cloyd's hand tighten on my arm.

"Okay, if I am, take that bandage off."

"What!"

"It ain't welding burns, is it? It's a dog bite. When you shot Bowery, Black bit you through the sliding window you put in."

Then it was like Jackie's face was workin' to cry and he sat down.

"I never meant to do it," he whispered. "We was sittin' in his truck and he was telling me how stupid I was. How his lousy twenty percent would keep me from selling this place and Henry Zane would never get his shopping mall. He *really* hated Zane. Bowery would have made close to a half million and you know him and his money . . ." Jackie laughed in a gulping sort of way.

"Look!" He unfastened his satchel and took out a handful of bills.

"Look what I found in his truck! And this!" He scooped up a handful of coins. "Well, look at it!"

(We was doing just that.)

He spread his hands and

laughed. "It was in that extra gas tank he had me put on his truck, remember, Cloyd? That week we worked for him. He'd been stuffin' it full for years. I couldn't believe it. I put the truck in the press, started flattening that sucker, and about halfway through I seen coins spraying out! Can you believe it?" He begun to giggle.

"So then I figure I'll take it and go down to one of them islands or maybe South America. Bowery owed me. I was gonna write a letter to Jerry Bridger. Swear I was. Connie wasn't gonna go to jail. I swear."

He scooped out a couple of handfuls and held them out to us. "We can split it. There's near a hundred thousand here."

Was then Jerry Bridger pulled up outside and Jackie pulled a pistol from the bag.

"Wish you hadn't called him. Wish I didn't have to do this." He pointed the gun at us and licked his lips. "You're going to drive me clean to Mexico."

"No, we ain't," said Cloyd. "You gonna shoot us, Jackie?"

"If I have to," he said, stuffing money back into the bag.

Jerry Bridger was standing in the rain watching us.

"You gonna shoot Jerry?" I asked. "We got our youngest child in the car. You gonna shoot her, too?"

Jackie's face tensed up. A lit-

tle muscle jumped by his eye and you could see veins on his head. He stared at us, then threw the gun in the bag.

"No," he said. "I ain't gonna do any more shooting."

He sat down and smiled at us. It was the saddest smile I ever saw.

Jerry Bridger come in.

Cloyd heaved air and leaned against the desk. "I ain't never comin' home for lunch again."

It was about a month later that Cloyd and me was sitting in a fancy French restaurant with Connie and Stephan Taylor.

"When Diane and I get everything split up proper, I want to pay you," said Connie.

"Oh, that ain't necessary," I said. (Cloyd kicked me under the table.) "This dinner is enough. I mean, I ain't licensed or nothin'. Might not be legal."

"It'll be a gift, then. Believe me, I can afford it."

I thought of the pile of money on Jackie's desk.

"Well," I fluttered my eyes modestly. "Okay."

"Did you hear they found a deathbed confession from the man who worked with Henry Zane to swindle that money?" asked Stephan. "They set up a dummy company and they set Bowery up, too. It took him years to find that man."



"Wonder why Bowery didn't use it," I said.

"Well, for one thing, Papa just got it a couple of months ago. I don't know," Connie sighed. "Maybe he was waiting until it was closer to election time, or maybe he'd been so bitter and spiteful for so many years he just wanted to hold onto the feeling. Do you know what I mean?"

"I think so," I said. "In a way, Zane *was* responsible for what happened. Otherwise your daddy might have sold that land or at least let Jackie sell the auto salvage."

"Diane and Chuck are working a deal for the auto salvage," said Connie. "So they're satisfied."

"They'll never be satisfied," said Stephan. "Did you show them the picture?"

"No," Connie smiled and pulled a well-worn magazine clipping from her purse. "When I was little, I would pretend this was what our house was really like."

It was a white house with a big front porch and a white picket fence and geraniums in boxes.

"It's silly," she blushed.

"But now," said Stephan, taking her hand, "it's going to come true."

"Ain't it romantic?" I asked

Cloyd later that night in bed.

"What?"

"Connie and Stephan. Ain't it sweet?"

"Yeah, it's sweet." He burped. "I ate too much. You know what onion soup does to your stomach?"

"I got a feeling. It's a catharsis experience. You know, when we was dating we never burped around each other."

"Sorry. You want me to go outside? And what in the world is a catharsis experience?"

"What *did* we do when we dated and had gas? Catharsis is a cleansing . . . a cleaning out. Disney!"

The dog was trying to sneak up on the bed, thinking if she didn't look at us we wouldn't see her. "Go lay down!"

She slunk out of the room, bumping into a wall on her way. "That dog," said Cloyd, "is the dumbest animal I ever seen. I swear they dropped her on her head as a pup."

He threw back the covers and got up.

"Where are you going?"

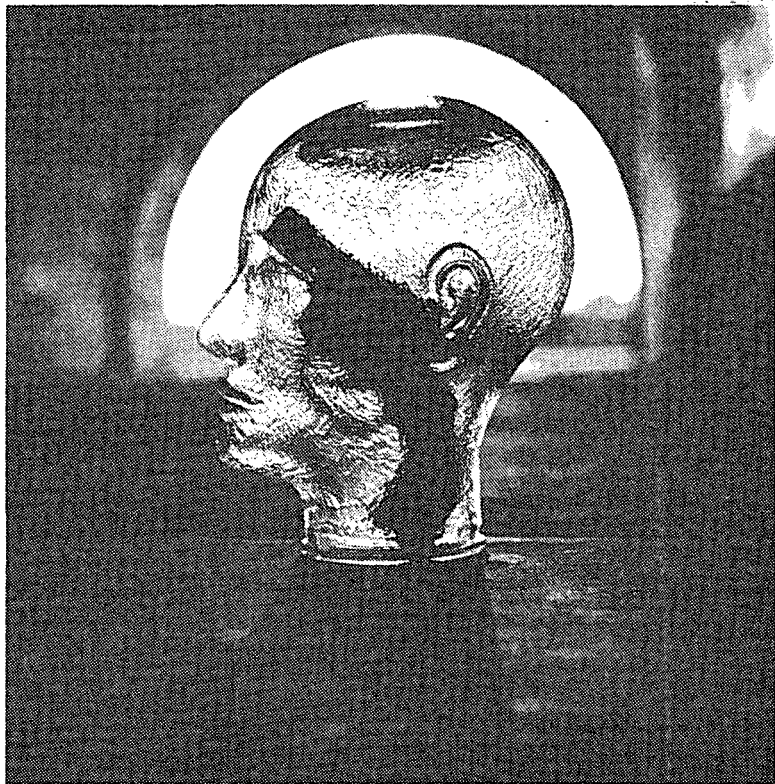
"To the bathroom. I don't want to embarrass myself and I've got to cathart."

I begun to giggle.

Cloyd turned at the door.

"And when I get back, I want to know what that dog was doing with *my* socks on, you hear?"

# THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



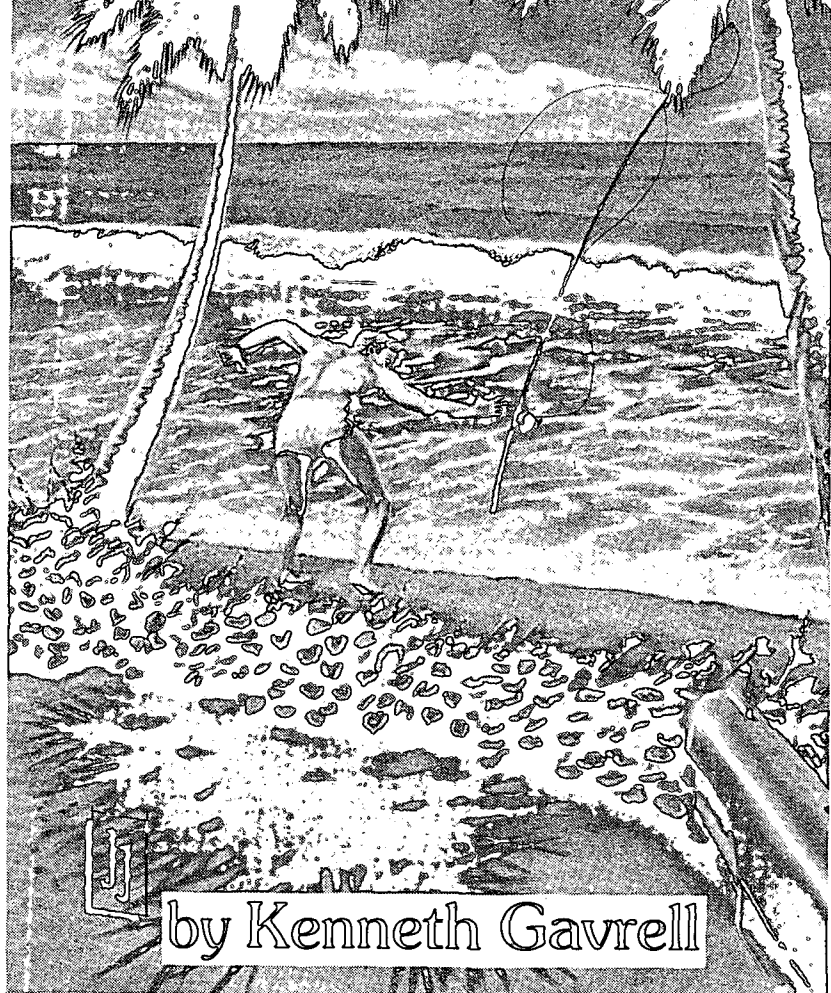
*Arthur Tress*

Fellow. swallowed wrong. We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less—and be sure to include a crime, please), based on the above photograph. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the February Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

FICTION

# Island of the Snake



by Kenneth Gavrell

---

---

**T**he sea looked like creme de menthe. It rose in long, lazy swells under the early morning sun. Our ferry mounted stubbornly with an occasional grunt from its engines.

My watch was just edging eight o'clock. We had awakened at four thirty for the long drive to Fajardo, and I felt sleepy. Raquel was already dozing on the seat beside me, her blonde hair fingering the warm breeze.

It was New Year's Day, but you couldn't tell it by the sleepy faces around me. We had passed the evening with a quiet lobster dinner at Raquel's place and had gone to bed early. At midnight we'd been awakened by the roar of San Juan, punctuated by idiots firing guns into the air. Every year three or four people were wounded by the idiots. New Year's Eve was a good night to stay home.

In another hour we'd be arriving at the tiny island of Culebra, where we planned to spend the next three days fishing, swimming, and loafing. We both felt we deserved it.

I laid my head back against the seat and closed my eyes. Pink eyelids shut out everything except the steady rumble of the engines. They had been rumbling like that for an hour, and we were now on open sea.

Suddenly the rumbling

changed, slowed perceptibly. I wondered why. A moment later I heard shouting from the pilot house above us. I opened my eyes and saw two boathands running toward the starboard side. One of them yelled up to the pilot house. I distinctly heard "*Es el hijo de Doña Irma!*" It's Doña Irma's son!" A buzzing began among the other passengers.

I got up and walked to the side. Far ahead on the sun-shimmering water I could make out a black dot. As we approached it, the dot expanded and assumed the form of a small boat. In another couple of minutes it became a white Boston whaler of about eighteen feet with a big outboard. There was a shape hunched in the boat.

"*Quién es?* Who is it?" I asked the short, grizzled boathand next to me.

"*Hector, el hijo de Doña Irma,*" he said. "We've been looking for him. He left for Culebra at eight last night and never arrived."

"His motor must have quit," I said.

"*Parece,*" he said. "It looks like it."

We were now quite close to the smaller boat. Our pilot cut the engines altogether and we drifted towards it over the creme de menthe. Passengers were



beginning to line the side.

The whaler rose and fell tranquilly on the swells. The man in her appeared to be asleep. He was wearing a sleeveless undershirt and baggy brown pants. The two boathands near me shouted at him, but he didn't respond.

"He must be passed out," the grizzled one beside me said. "He had a rough night: a squall passed through here about midnight."

Hector's clothes did look soaked, and the bottom of the boat held six inches of water. A plastic bleach-bottle bailer and a fifth of rum bobbed and banged in the bottom. Near the center stood a soaked stack of boxes, some of which clearly contained foodstuffs.

The pilot shouted something I didn't catch and then the other, younger boathand kicked off his shoes and made a fine arching dive into the sea. He surfaced about ten feet from the whaler and swam to her and hoisted himself over the side.

The stern of our ferry was now facing the whaler, and the boathand beside me stood at the rail and yelled to the other to throw him the whaler's rope. A moment later the rope came snaking through the air and the older one caught it and secured it to a giant iron cleat which looked as old as I had felt

at four thirty that morning. Then he pulled the whaler close until she rubbed against the rear of the ferry.

"What's wrong with him?" he asked the one in the whaler.

"He's dead!"

At first the older man didn't reply. Then he said, "What do you mean dead?"

"Dead! Shot! There's a bullet hole in his forehead."

"*Coño*," the older man said, but he said it sadly.

By now all the passengers were around us, all talking at once. An old lady took out a rosary and started to tell the beads silently.

The pilot shouted instructions to bring the body aboard. In a short time it was lying on the rusty deck, a soggy, grey mannequin with a black hole near the middle of its forehead and another just above the neck of the undershirt, which the boathand had not noticed. It was a slight, wiry mannequin with a not unhandsome face and a two-day growth of beard. It was maybe thirty years old. Four men carried it gingerly to a long plastic bench beneath an overhang behind the pilot house. They covered it with a green tarp.

The pilot started the engines and turned the ferry's nose back toward Culebra. The whaler skipped along twenty feet be-

hind the ferry for a few seconds and then began to drop far astern. The rope had snapped.

The pilot ground the engines into reverse and we closed the distance to the free-floating whaler. Once again the younger boathand dived into the drink and got aboard her. This time they threw him a thick brown rope from the ferry. He secured the whaler, then reached down for the floating rum bottle and gurgled down whatever was left in it. He tossed the bottle to Davy Jones, and they hauled him up on the ferry deck for the second time. He was dripping and looked cold; but not as cold as Hector.

"Happy New Year," I heard one of the crowd mutter as the pilot restarted the engines.

Raquel had slept through all of it. When she woke up twenty minutes later and I told her, she was angry.

"Why didn't you wake me up?"

"I guess I was too engrossed in what was going on."

"Damn it, Carlos. Where's the body?"

I pointed to the sodden tarp.

"It's a strange place to shoot somebody," Raquel said.

"It would make sense if they were trying to highjack the boat," I said, "but they didn't."

"Maybe they were after something in the boat."

"We're not detectives for the next three days," I said. "Just lovers on vacation."

"You pull one more stunt like that, and you won't be seeing much loving," Raquel said.

The water next to the cement pier in Culebra was as clear as rock crystal. The little town climbed a narrow, curving street from the harbor. To the right and left of the town were stretches of white beach and thickets of sea grapes.

Apparently the pilot had radioed ahead because an ambulance and four policemen were waiting for us on the pier—probably the whole police force of the island. They didn't have a murder every day. A woman stood among the policemen sobbing hysterically. She was about sixty and fat and dressed in a cheap flowered print. I guessed she was Doña Irma. The police came on board to talk to the crew while the rest of us lined up to disembark. Doña Irma was supported by two uniforms to her son's body. When they uncovered his face, her own disintegrated like a house hit by a wrecking ball. We disembarked quickly to get away from her cries.

The pier was humming. Those waiting to board the ferry for Fajardo pushed against the



metal gate. Heaps of baggage—tattered suitcases, cardboard boxes, coolers, canvas bags—strewn the pier. Raquel and I picked our way to the street. She had been there before and had selected our hotel, a few blocks into the town. We passed a diving shop, two restaurants, a small park, the City Hall, and eventually arrived at El Retiro, a neat cosy wood-fronted place squeezed between concrete.

"You'll like it here," Raquel said. "Our room faces on the canal in back."

"Are there any fish in it?"

"You can try from the window."

The hotel's owner wasn't around, but a next door neighbor sent her son to look for him. He arrived fifteen minutes later, a huge man with a close-cropped grey beard and a hunting knife on his belt. He held out his hand and welcomed us as Señor and Señora Nieves. Raquel had made the reservations in her name. I hauled our bags up to the second floor while she filled out the card.

There was a canal back there all right. An occasional small craft passed the hotel window, keeping to the deeper water in the center. I saw a school of small needlefish flicking along the surface near the other shore. On the side opposite us was a

house with a back yard full of chickens and pigs.

I started unpacking my fishing gear.

Culebra means snake or serpent, but I don't know how the island got its name because it didn't look at all like a snake and it didn't have any snakes either. It was one of the most tranquil places I'd seen. There were few cars and a small population, and the town had just got its first bakery six months ago. Only three places could be called restaurants and about as many hotels, if you were willing to stretch the word shamelessly. There were no supermarkets—just three or four small *colmados*. In winter, I learned, they got a lot of Germans—and in fact the place did seem more Mediterranean than Puerto Rican. Americans were beginning to discover it.

I looked out at a trio of beautiful sailboats as I cast from the surf of a beach near town. I wore a bathing suit and tennis shoes because of the sharp coral fragments that paved the bottom. I cast a three-eighths ounce yellow jig, and in an hour and a half I'd caught two fish: a two-foot barracuda and a grey snapper. I released the fish. It had been a long time since I'd been fishing—a trip several years

ago with a friend to Canada—and I felt very content. At one thirty I quit and walked along the hot road back to town. The sand in my wet tennis shoes scraped against my feet and made the walking uncomfortable.

Raquel was napping under the ceiling fan with the drapes drawn. I went into the bathroom to shower. Only a thin worm of water squirmed from the shower head. When I came out, Raquel was sitting on the bed.

"Do you plan to do anything besides sleep on this trip?" I asked.

"You're in a fine mood."

"There's damned little water, and it's not hot."

"Culebra has a perennial water shortage."

"Let's go get something to eat," I suggested.

During lunch at a restaurant down towards the harbor, we saw the older boathand from the ferry. He was drinking beer and wiping his greying mustache with the back of his hand. I approached him.

"What's happening about the murder?" I asked.

It took him a moment to recognize me; then he said: "I don't know. The police have the body."

"Was the man disliked around here?"

"No, Hector was a nice guy. He lived with his mother since his divorce a few months ago."

"Why would anyone shoot him?"

"He may have gotten into trouble in Fajardo."

"What kind of trouble?"

He regarded me through squinted eyes. "You're a very curious man," he said. "Are you police yourself?"

"A private detective," I said, "in San Juan." I held out my hand. "My name's Carlos Bannon."

"Jorge Ayala." His hand felt like thick leather.

I invited him to join us and he accepted. He was very gallant when I introduced Raquel. Her presence suddenly untied his tongue.

"Oh, I knew Hector quite well. He fished some, and when the fishing wasn't good he did odd jobs. He was a good carpenter. But he had his faults: he drank too much—" he glanced shyly at Raquel "—he had a weakness for women."

"That's why you said he might have gotten into trouble at Fajardo."

Ayala nodded. "He might have had a girl there." He turned to Raquel and smiled his fifty-year-old Casanova smile: "Are you planning to stay long, señora?"

Raquel smiled back. "Only three days."

"Is this your first time to Culebra?"

"No, my second. But Carlos hasn't been before."

"We have a fine little island," he said proudly. "Peaceful. If I can be of any service . . ."

"Thank you," Raquel said. They both smiled again.

That evening, as we were about to go to dinner, there was a timid knock at our door. I opened it to a fat, sixtyish woman with a face of abject misery: Doña Irma. "Señor Bannon?" she asked tentatively.

"Yes, that's right."

"I am Irma Peña, the mother of the man they found this morning. I'm sorry. Jorge Ayala told me about you."

"I don't understand."

"Jorge says you are a private detective in San Juan."

"That's right. Won't you come in?"

She entered self-effacingly, with a sidelong look at Raquel. I offered her one of the two chairs in the room. Raquel was drying her nails in the other. I leaned against the bureau and lit a cigarette.

"Why have you come to see me, Doña Irma?"

"To hire you to investigate my son's—" she had trouble getting the word out—"death."

"But I'm only on vacation here for a few days."

"I can pay you," she said abruptly. "I have money."

"It's not a question of the money . . ."

"I sold a piece of our land two months ago. Land in Culebra is very expensive."

"Well, tell me about your son," I said. "Perhaps I can be of some help."

So she told me, not without some crying. She seemed a strong woman, but her son's sudden murder had severely taxed her emotional resources.

Hector Peña hadn't been a bad "boy," only a little "wild." He had drunk too much, but he had been a hard worker and very helpful—people liked him. Six months ago he was divorced from his wife and came to live with her. The reason for the divorce was that he had gotten another woman pregnant. She knew it was true because Hector admitted it to her. He took his wild side from his father. His father was dead. She didn't know what she was going to do now with both of them gone.

Hector would make regular trips to Fajardo in his boat for supplies. Not much was available on Culebra, and what was was very expensive. On this last trip he had been in Fajardo two days. He said he had friends there, and on a couple of occasions he had had visitors who were not from Culebra.

"What kind of visitors?"

"Oh, men—two or three of them. I didn't like the look of them."

"Why?"

"I don't know, they looked like troublemakers to me."

"What did they do when they came?"

"Oh, they talked and drank."

"What did they talk about?"

"It wasn't my place to spy on my own son."

"Could he also have had a girlfriend in Fajardo, Doña Irma?"

She hesitated. "Well," she said, "it's possible."

"Jorge Ayala thinks he had a girlfriend."

"It's possible," she persisted.

"Hector never mentioned a girl to you?"

"No."

"What can you tell me about your son's ex-wife?"

"Ha, a bad one," she said. "I never liked her. She has a hot temper, that one."

"She lives here on Culebra?"

"Of course. She remained with the house on Ensenada Honda."

"Perhaps I'll pay her a visit."

"I'll give you directions to the house," Doña Irma said. "It's not hard to find. Will you help me, then?"

"I may do a little checking around."

"And your fee?"

"I haven't accepted any case,"

I said. "We can talk about that later."

The next morning after breakfast, Raquel and I started for the house of Hector Peña's ex-wife.

Raquel had reminded me that she was also a P.I., and she didn't intend to spend most of her vacation alone. The section of the bay where the house was situated was a twenty-five minute walk by a good paved road. We had to stop twice to ask directions, but we found it: an old, one story wooden structure very close to the water. There were two dogs in the front yard and an ancient rowboat rocking beside a sagging dock in back. The bay was huge and virtually enclosed by hilly terrain. Its surface was sprinkled with boats of every description, many of them sizeable yachts. Raquel said Ensenada Honda was supposed to be the safest harbor within a hundred miles.

The underfed mutts slunk away as we approached the house. Through the screen door I could hear a man's voice yelling. We climbed the three wooden steps and looked into a shadowy interior: a shirtless, beer-bellied man was flicking the channels of a small TV. I rapped on the door. He turned and eyed us before he strolled over.

"*Buscamos a la señora Carmen Solís,*" I said. "We're looking for Mrs. Carmen Solís."

He eyed us some more. He was about thirty-five, and his spongy face looked as though very little went on behind it.

"*Por qué? Why?*" he asked finally, suspiciously.

"*Es sobre el fallecimiento de Hector Peña.* It's in relation to the death of Hector Peña."

"Are you police?" he asked.

"We're private investigators. Mr. Peña's mother hired us."

I showed him my license and Raquel took hers out as well.

A young woman walked through the door on the other side of the room. "*Quién es? Who is it?*" she asked.

He just waved her in our direction with his chunky head. She walked across the room, her body bursting from a tight yellow blouse and bluejeans.

"What is it?" she asked.

I repeated what I'd just told Dr. Einstein.

"I don't know anything about it," she said.

"Well, could we ask you one or two questions? You might be able to help."

"I never heard of a female private detective," she said, giving Raquel a once-over.

"There are a few of us around," Raquel said.

The man had wandered back to the TV set. He took a can of

beer off the set and dropped into an imitation leather chair. He was watching a soap opera.

"Well, I guess I can give you a minute," the woman said. She spoke as though there were few things in the world more precious than her minutes.

She pulled open the screen door and joined us on the tiny porch.

Carmen Solís was in her late twenties and pretty the way artificial gladiolas are pretty. Her eyelashes were long and black and false.

"I understand you were married to Señor Peña," I said.

"That's right, for three years."

"He seems to have been murdered yesterday on his way back from Fajardo."

"I heard about it. By now, everybody's heard about it."

"Do you have any idea who might have shot him?"

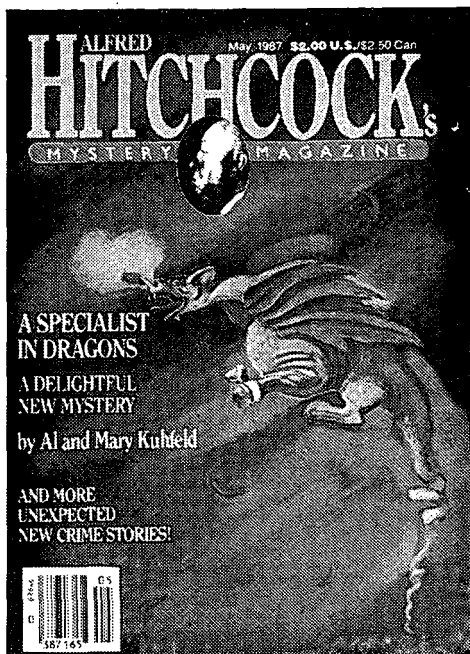
"I haven't kept up with his fancy-pants amours for the last six months."

"He was a ladies' man?"

"Why do you think I divorced the son of a bitch? He got another woman pregnant, the *ca-brón*. A girl, hardly eighteen. Brainless, like him."

"We've heard he had some strange friends in Fajardo," Raquel put in.

Carmen Solís gave her another, not very friendly look-over. "I don't know them. I



# SOME PEOPLE WOULD KILL

# FOR A COPY.

**SUBSCRIBE NOW AND SAVE UP TO  
33% OFF THE COVER PRICE**

**CALL TOLL-FREE 1-800-247-2160**

**(Iowa residents Call 1-800-362-2860)**

- ☐ Please send me 18 issues of ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE for only \$23.97—I save 33% off the newsstand price.
- ☐ Please send me 12 issues for only \$16.97.

☐ Payment Enclosed ☐ Bill Me

☐ Charge  
(Circle one)



Mail to: **Alfred Hitchcock**  
P.O. Box 1932  
Marion, Ohio 43305

Card# \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

OUTSIDE US & POSS., 12 FOR \$19.97, 18 for \$26.97  
(CASH WITH ORDER US FUNDS). PLEASE ALLOW  
6-8 WEEKS FOR DELIVERY OF YOUR FIRST ISSUE.

DHC7H-3  
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heard he had visitors sometimes."

"Who do you suppose these types were?" I asked.

"No-good bums like himself."

"Was he as bad as all that?" Raquel asked.

"A worm, a rat. He deserved what he got."

"What he got was two bullets," I said.

"Good. Will that be all?"

"Well, if you hear anything—any rumors—we'd appreciate it if you'd let us know," I said. "We're staying at El Retiro."

"You're likely to hear as quick as I am," she said. "That's all anybody's talking about today."

"Thank you for your time, Señora Solís," Raquel said.

"Don't call me señora," the other woman said. "I'm single now, and I intend to stay that way for quite a while."

We said adiós and walked back to the street.

"You think that guy's her new boyfriend?" I asked Raquel.

"Who else? She seems to run to brainless types."

"Hey!" a shrill cry pierced our backs.

We turned.

"A lot of people with small boats run drugs to the big island," Carmen Solís called.

She disappeared into the house, the screen door slamming behind her.

After lunch Raquel took a nap while I walked down to the same beach where I'd caught the two fish the previous day. I cast out over the waves for half an hour without a single strike. I decided to give it five more casts before quitting. As the line hissed through the guides on my third cast, I heard two sharp reports from the thick tangles of sea grapes behind me. I fell forward into the water and sprawled there with the waves and coral shards churning around me. No more shots came.

I crawled slowly up onto dry sand and lay still and studied the labyrinthine foliage. It lined almost the entire shore behind the narrow beach. Nothing moved. He had all the cover in the world; I couldn't see any for myself. After five minutes or so, I found the guts to push myself up into a semi-sitting position, ready to flatten instantly if need be. But nothing happened. I was still trembling like a mouse in a cobra cage.

He appeared to be gone. Why? He had only been trying to scare me. That sounded good. But I got to my feet cautiously. The beach had returned to the idyll of a poster in a travel agency.

Some minutes later I found, more by accident than any-



thing else, one of the bullets he'd fired, lodged in the trunk of a small coconut palm near the water's edge. The tree stood about six feet behind where I'd been casting. The slug was buried deep, but I eventually worked it out with my army knife. It looked like a .32 or 7.65 mm. I clutched it jealously in my fist as I started back to town and the police station.

Culebra's police station was at the edge of town on a road along the bay. It was as small as you'd expect, with two Isuzu Troopers and two motorcycles baking in its lot. Inside I found three cops, one of them behind the raised desk and the others talking seriously to an attractive young woman whose tears flowed like wine. I asked the one behind the desk if I could speak to whoever was in charge of the Hector Peña case. He was a surly, self-important type who seemed reluctant to budge from his perch, but he condescended to enter an office door behind him. I listened to the young woman's story of her husband's crass brutality. The surly cop emerged from the office door with another in a sergeant's uniform.

The sergeant looked like a shorter, older version of Alex Karras with a good suntan. He

introduced himself as Officer Reyes. I introduced myself and asked if we could talk in the office. He nodded and led me into an orderly cement-walled cubicle with three desks and one window. He motioned me to a chair and sat on one of the metal desks.

I gave Reyes the complete rundown, right up to the two shots on the beach an hour before. He was a good listener. When I presented him with the bullet I'd dug from the palm tree, he grunted and examined it as if it held all the answers to the problem of Hector Peña's murder.

"A .32," he said.

"Yes; do you have many .32's registered on the island?"

"Quite a few. But I doubt that the one that fired this is registered. They never are."

"You sound like you've spent some time in the big city."

"Fifteen years. Then I decided I'd had enough of it and got myself transferred down here. It's quiet here. Usually. My family likes it."

"Well, you're having a regular crime wave the last couple of days," I said. "What was the caliber of the bullets that killed Peña?"

"I don't know. The body has been sent to San Juan for autopsy and a ballistics report. Neither bullet exited."

"Small caliber," I said. "When do you expect the reports?"

"I suppose it depends on how busy they are. They're busier on weekends." He lit a cigarette. "Do you think he was trying to kill you or scare you?"

"Scare me. He could have killed me if he wanted."

"Maybe he's just a rotten shot. If I were you, I'd get off the Peña thing."

"I'll think about it. Have you come up with any leads?"

"If I had, would I tell you?" He smiled. He had gold caps on most of his front teeth. "Anyway, the case is being taken out of my hands," he said. "They're sending two homicide experts from the big island. They should be here any time."

I knew how he felt about that. Police are very possessive about their own turf.

"Could Peña have been involved in drug running?" I asked.

He raised his eyebrows slightly. "Could be. But I doubt it: I don't think Hector was the type."

"You knew him?"

"On this island, everybody knows everybody."

"Well, I'll check back with you later," I said, getting to my feet.

"Why?" he asked.

"To see if this bullet matches the two from Peña's body," I said impatiently.

"What if it does? We still won't be any closer to Hector's murderer or your sniper."

I supposed he was right about that.

"You had me worried," Raquel said as I came in. "Where the hell were you?"

"Somebody took two shots at me down on the shore."

"Oh, Carlos." She put her arms around me.

"I think whoever it was was just trying to warn me off the Peña case."

"This is not the kind of vacation I had in mind," Raquel said, but not at all humorously.

"I talked to the policeman in charge of the case. He advised me to get off it."

"Very sound advice," Raquel said. "Let's go back to San Juan."

"No, I'm not leaving yet. Did you bring a gun?"

"No."

"Well, I've got my Browning in the suitcase. I intend to wear it from now on."

I found the gun and checked the magazine and strapped it on. Raquel watched me in silence. I slipped a light jacket on over the gun.

"I think it would be best if you stayed out of it from here on in," I said.

She didn't say anything.

"I'm going to talk to Doña Irma again," I said.

"Be careful," Raquel said.

"Oh, don't worry about that."

I kissed her on the cheek and went downstairs and called the number Doña Irma had left me. The old woman gave me directions to her home on a hill overlooking the town. I got there in ten minutes.

"Have you learned something?" she asked anxiously as she opened the door.

"I don't know. Apparently somebody thinks I could: I was shot at this afternoon."

"My God," she said. She raised a hand to her ample breast.

"I think they were just trying to scare me. Look, Doña Irma, I've been working on the assumption that your son was shot by connections he had in Fajardo, but apparently someone here is involved. Do you have any idea who that might be?"

Her pudgy face twisted with thought.

"Is it possible that your son might have been involved in running drugs to the big island?"

"Who told you that?" she asked quickly.

"I'd rather not say."

"Hector smoked a little marijuana," she blurted out. "That is not the same as transporting drugs."

"No; but it could be connected," I said.

"My son was a good boy," she said.

"Not everybody seems to think so."

"You can stop your investigation," she said.

"I don't want to stop it now," I said. "Somebody shot at me: that upsets me."

"If you're going to make accusations against Hector, I would rather you stopped your investigating," she said.

"There'll be no fee," I said as I turned toward the door. "There's not much left that I believe in, Doña Irma, but I do believe in getting at the truth."

"We don't need truth," she said. "We need food, clothing, and shelter. We don't need truth."

"In my world, we do," I said. I closed the door behind me and walked across the tiled terrace. At the edge of the terrace, I surveyed the area. To my right, rolling hills and stubbled fields basked in the sun. There were no nearby houses. To my left I saw one house, about two hundred yards away. I headed down to where it stood at the base of a hill under a spreading tree. It was a concrete cube with a carport on the side. A beat-up Dodge pickup sat in the shade of the carport.

The front door was closed, but I heard a radio from the windows. The door sported a brass knocker in the shape of a seductive mermaid, and I banged it a few times. I heard a "Voy,"

and the door was opened by a tall man whose face and hair said he was in his fifties, but whose body argued for twenty years less.

"Who are you?" he asked, not too friendly.

I told him in my Mr. Ingratiating style. He peered at my license.

After my prologue, I introduced the subject of Hector Peña's off-island visitors.

"Sí, I've seen them," he said, still not too friendly. "Young guys in their twenties with fancy shirts and beer cans glued to their fingers."

"Where did they come from?"

"Who knows?"

"Why do you think they came?"

"To drink and waste time. Peña liked to drink."

"Do you think one of them might have killed him? Maybe because Peña was involved in running drugs?"

His lean, shrewd face digested that suggestion for some seconds. He seemed to like the idea. But he said: "More likely his ex-wife arranged it. She hated his guts."

"Would she be capable of that?"

"I think so."

"How did you feel about Hector Peña?" I asked him.

"I didn't like the way he looked at my daughter. I told

him to stay away from my place."

"He tried to approach your daughter?"

"He tried to approach every young woman on Culebra. He had a bad itch in his pants."

"Did you threaten him?"

"I told him to stay away from my place," he repeated doggedly.

"Is your daughter at home, Señor . . . ?"

"Caraballo. And no, she isn't."

"Could I talk to her later?"

"I don't think so," he said evenly.

I decided he meant that, so I said goodbye and left him watching me as I plodded down the road toward the setting sun.

We had dinner that night at an outdoor restaurant near the harbor. I brought Raquel up to date. After dinner we met some American tourists on their way to a bar, who invited us to join them. We joined them and drank margaritas while we talked about Ronald Reagan's hair and falling oil prices and American business interests in Puerto Rico. The drinking entertained me, but the conversation didn't. At a quarter to eleven we were back at our hotel. There was a sheet of paper on the floor just inside our door.

It was lined yellow paper of legal size, folded twice. I opened

it to find a couple of lines printed with a ballpoint pen:

*Deja la investigación de la muerte de Peña. Es peligrosa.*

*No vamos a fallar la segunda vez.*

In English: Stop looking into Peña's death. It's dangerous. We won't miss the second time.

Raquel didn't like that at all. I went downstairs to the apartment of the hotel owner. He opened the door in Bermuda shorts that looked too small on his bulk. His grey eyes were curious.

"*Sí, Señor Nieves?*"

I asked him if he'd seen anyone go upstairs that evening. He said he didn't check on who went up and down. As I knew, he left the street door unlocked so the hotel guests could come and go as they pleased.

"Someone left a note under our door," I said.

"Didn't they sign it?"

"No — not this kind of note."

He walked to a table and pulled a pack of cigarettes and a lighter off it. He offered me a cigarette and we both lit up.

"I hear you're looking into the Peña murder for Doña Irma," he said.

"There are no secrets in this town."

"Very few. Take my advice: don't waste your time. He's not worth your trouble."

"Several people seem to feel

that way," I said. I wished him a goodnight and climbed back up the stairs.

It took Raquel a long time to get to sleep, and it took me longer. I thought about that note: it had said "we," which suggested the drug connection. Doña Irma had suddenly told me to drop the case when I'd asked if her son might have been involved in drug running. But why would they have killed Peña? Had he been asked to run drugs and refused to cooperate? That sounded weak. Had he moved in on someone else's territory? That sounded a little better. Perhaps he'd double-crossed them, or tried to.

And why shoot him on the ocean in his boat? That was a silly question: what better place to shoot somebody?

I didn't get much sleep that night. It was partly the miserable mattress.

**W**e ran into Jorge Ayala, the boat hand from the ferry, at the same restaurant the next morning. He was drinking coffee laced with rum. He asked how we were enjoying our vacation. I told him it was very relaxing.

"I've been told you have been pretty active," he said.

"Who told you?"

"I went to ask Doña Irma if

there was anything I could do for her."

"She wants me to stop my inquiries."

He shrugged his burly shoulders. "You are on a beautiful island with a beautiful woman—" he nodded gallantly to Raquel "—the weather is fine, the sea is warm. Life is too short to waste precious opportunities."

"I'll bet you were quite a ladies' man when you were younger," Raquel said.

"What do you mean, when I was younger."

"As much of a ladies' man as Hector Peña?" I asked.

"There you are, back to that again."

"Who was the girl he got pregnant?"

"Juana Vélez." He tapped his grizzled pate. "She is not too bright."

"I think I'd like to talk to her. Where does she live?"

"Enjoy our island," he said.

"I am enjoying it. Where will I find her?"

"She lives with her family about a mile past Doña Irma's house on the same road. The house is painted green and yellow."

"That shouldn't be too hard to find."

Ayala turned to Raquel. "You need someone to show you around our island while your husband is running after wild

geese. I am free until four today."

"Oh, I'm going with my husband," Raquel said.

"No, you're not," I said.

"Yes, I am."

I'd had this conversation before. I knew I wasn't going to win it.

"I did a lot of thinking last night," Raquel said.

"Well, you're going to do a lot of walking right now."

"Fine," she said. "Let's go."

We left Jorge Ayala looking very disappointed.

The Vélez house was on a flat piece of land near the water. Its bright green walls were almost chartreuse and its yellow glowed like a traffic light. But beneath the new paint, the house was old enough to feel embarrassed in that getup. A party was taking place in another house closer to the shore, to judge from the noise and the number of people outside.

A man in a wheelchair was shelling *gandules* in the Vélez front yard. Behind him a woman was hanging clothes on a line stretched between two palm trees.

"Señor Vélez?" I asked as we came up.

"*Sí. En qué puedo servirles?* Yes. What can I do for you?"

"My name is Carlos Bannon and this is my friend, Miss Nieves."

He said "*Encantado*" to us

both. He was a slight man, and I suspected he was younger than he looked. His disease, whatever it was, had taken its toll.

"My wife, Josefina," he said, indicating the woman who now walked up beside him.

The wife was a dowdy, perhaps once pretty, woman in her forties. She took her place behind his wheelchair.

"I wonder if we could talk to your daughter Juana," I said.

"I don't understand," Vélez said. "About what?"

"Well, about the death of Hector Peña. We have been hired by Doña Irma to look into it."

"You are investigators?"

"Yes."

"My daughter has not seen him in months," Vélez said. "She knows nothing about his death."

"Only a few words," I persisted.

He opened his bony hands as if to say "Be my guest" and told his wife to fetch the daughter. The woman went into the house and appeared in a minute with a yellow-haired girl in a loose, thin dress who looked sixteen. Peña's ex-wife had told me she was eighteen. In the crook of the girl's left arm lay a baby of six or seven months. The baby had a dirty face and a pacifier in its mouth. Neither of them was very attractive.

The girl approached shyly, staying close to her mother.

"Senorita Vélez, my name is Carlos Bannon." She didn't react at all. "I was wondering if you could tell me about Hector Peña. Whether you have any notion of who might have murdered him."

"Oh!" she said, her face looking horrified.

"If you have any idea who could have done it . . ."

"It's awful," she said. "Awful. There are bad people in the world."

"Yes, there are," I agreed.

"I am told they do horrible things. Hector was very nice to me. He brought me flowers once."

"Yes, that's why we want to do all we can to discover what happened to him," I prodded.

"Oh, I don't understand that," she said. The baby started to cry. It had dropped its pacifier. I noticed that its head seemed over-large and its body moved strangely, jerkily, in its distress.

The daughter was bending awkwardly and searching for the fallen pacifier with her free hand. Raquel spotted it in the grass and retrieved it for her. The girl smiled her thanks. She popped the gadget into the baby's mouth and said, "I like your skirt," to Raquel.

"Thank you," Raquel said. "How old is the baby?"



"A little over seven months. He worries me: he cries so much."

"He will be all right," the father said to no one in particular.

An old green car topped the hill behind us and descended noisily into the pebbly drive beside the house. A man in his early twenties got out and walked over. Señor Vélez introduced him as his son Luis. Luis was slight, like his father, with light hair and eyes. Señor Vélez explained why we were there.

"I doubt that Juana can help you," the son said. "She hasn't seen that bastard since before the baby was born."

"Someone suggested that Peña might have been running drugs up to Fajardo," I said.

"I hear some of that goes on," the son said.

"Did you hear about him?"

"No, but I wouldn't be surprised. He did make frequent trips to Fajardo."

"Why do you think he was murdered?"

"I suppose it had something to do with the time he spent in Fajardo."

"It always comes back to that," I said.

Raquel was petting the baby's head and cooing. I was getting tired of asking the same fruitless questions. So I touched her arm and we said goodbye. The

son accompanied us to the road.

"I should have killed the son of a bitch myself," he said, "after what he did to my sister."

"Did you?"

"Somebody beat me to it."

"Would you know if Peña used drugs?" I asked him.

"I've heard he smoked marijuana," Luis Vélez said.

I nodded and thanked him for his time.

The party in the neighboring house was getting livelier.

At about one that afternoon I walked over to the police station. I found Reyes sitting on top of a desk eating an empanadilla. "You're getting to be a regular visitor," he said.

"I just can't keep myself away. Did the autopsy and ballistics reports on Peña come in yet?"

"No. You're an impatient man. It's only a little over forty-eight hours since the body was brought in, and today's Sunday."

"Murder investigations don't take holidays," I said.

"Yours certainly doesn't."

He crammed the last of the empanadilla into his mouth and wiped his lips with a greasy napkin.

"What about the two homicide men from the big island?" I asked.

"They arrived last night."

They're out filling their little notebooks."

"Have they come up with anything?"

"I wouldn't know. They left here at nine and haven't checked in since. Have you come up with anything?"

"Take a look at this." I passed him the penned note I'd found under our door. He studied it seriously, then said:

"Get off the case."

"Doña Irma wants me to get off it, too — since I suggested to her that her son might have been running drugs."

"I want you off it," Reyes said. "I don't need another murder right now: it's bad for the tourist trade."

"Do you work for the police department or the chamber of commerce?"

"Is there any difference?" Reyes asked.

**B**y the time I arrived back at the hotel, I was sure of it: someone was following me. I had half sensed it on the way to the police station, and I had sensed it very strongly on the way back. I don't believe in ESP or telepathy or anything like that; if you feel something strongly, there are reasons: little signals that your senses pick up subconsciously until they accumulate into a "feeling" or

"intuition." In my case these intuitions are almost always right. On my way back from the police station, I had tried a couple of tricky maneuvers to trip him—or her—up, but they hadn't worked. Still, I was sure.

I hadn't really needed this; I had been feeling sufficiently insecure after finding the note last night.

Raquel was sipping a beer on the little patio behind the hotel.

"Is there a bar here?" I asked doubtfully.

"No, I got this at the colmado next door. You want a sip?"

"Thanks."

"What did the police have to say?"

"They don't seem very interested any more. The two homicide guys from San Juan have arrived."

"Our boat leaves at four thirty," Raquel said.

"I'm going to take another walk," I said. "I'll meet you at that seafood place for lunch at two thirty."

"Let it rest, Carlos. It's almost time to leave."

"I'll meet you at two thirty."

I got to the restaurant about ten minutes late. Raquel was sipping another beer. "We'd better hurry," she said. "We have to pack and pay the hotel bill. This ferry will be crowded."

"We won't be taking this ferry," I said.

"Oh, why not?"

"Because someone is following me around today and because I just spent a very fruitful hour."

"And?"

"And because I need your help in a little plan I have for this evening."

"Will anybody get killed?" she asked.

"I hope not."

**W**e stayed in our hotel room until after sundown. At seven I started for the harbor. It was a short walk, but every step of the way, the back of my neck told me that he was there.

I didn't try to trap him this time. Occasional glances back up the street revealed only the normal busyness of that section of town.

Hector Peña's Boston Whaler had been anchored in the harbor since our arrival on the ferry. I saw it now, bobbing on the wind-rippled surface about forty feet from shore. From its stern the anchor line angled into the dark water. Another line from its bow stretched to a broken concrete pile on shore. I walked down to the pile, unfastened the line, and started tugging. I figured the odds were fifty-fifty I could pull out the anchor, but nothing gave. I

peeled off my jacket and coiled the rope three times around my body and then over my shoulder. I gave it all I had and felt as if my guts were being squeezed through a clothes wringer. Stinging sweat ran into my eyes. Passersby stared at me. Just as I was about to burst or quit, I felt the slow, reluctant give in the sand. I moved my whole body forward and it gave more. It gave enough so that I could turn and grab the rope and tug the whaler in fast enough so that the anchor didn't have time to get a good purchase in the smooth sand. In seconds I had the damned thing beside the shore.

I jumped into the boat and searched carefully with my mini-flashlight. I went over every inch, bending down several times until, with an elated look on my face, I came up with a clenched fist and an expletive of success.

I climbed out of the boat, wetting my pants up to the calves, grabbed my jacket off the pile, and started quickly in the direction of the police station.

I was only eyes and ears; the rest of me had gone dormant. I hadn't gone two blocks before I heard Raquel's voice shout, "I've got him, Carlos!" I whirled around and saw him now, bending over with his hand at his ankle. "He's got a—" I began,

but she'd seen it too and I heard the loud report of my Browning echoing between the houses lining the street. He went down, and Raquel and I reached him at the same time. He was still trying to unsnap the ankle holster but I kicked his hand as hard as I could and it fell away as he screamed. Raquel kept my Browning trained at his head as I removed the stubby .32 revolver from his holster. She had shot him in the thigh of the same leg. He would live, but he wouldn't be much good at walking for a while.

**I**t was three hours later, and we were still in the police station. Raquel and I were on our third cup of coffee. Reyes was satisfying his curiosity.

"What Latin male would learn that a man had made his sister pregnant and then dropped her, and do nothing about it?" I said. "Juana Vélez was just a kid—and simple-minded at that—and Peña, a man of thirty, had taken her virginity. Her brother had to avenge the family's honor. But in spite of his rage, he planned it well, biding his time until the scandal had pretty much blown over and then choosing to murder Peña off the island, on his way *back* from Fajardo, so that it would look like there was some con-

nection with Peña's activities up there. Later, when he got jittery, Vélez began to behave stupidly; the shots at me and the note were stupid. But his play-acting was still good.

"This afternoon I took a walk to the only house near the Vélez place and asked some polite questions. One of that family is a fisherman, and he recalled that Luis Vélez's boat had been gone on the afternoon and evening of New Year's Eve. It was usually anchored next to his own just off shore."

"Did Vélez's family know he'd done it?" Reyes interrupted me.

"They must have—at least his parents. I doubt that he told them, but they could put two and two together. Anyway, today when I realized that somebody was following me, I arranged a trap with Raquel's help. I left the hotel after dark and pulled in Peña's boat and pretended to find something important and started for the police station. Vélez couldn't be sure what I might have found—perhaps he'd dropped something incriminating on the whaler. He was already jittery and the false security of darkness made him careless as well: Raquel, who had been following me at some distance, spotted him and yelled to me. When she moved in with my gun, he went for his own. She had to shoot.

I think you'll find there's a perfect ballistics match between Vélez's .32 and the bullets that killed Peña."

"And the one you dug from the palm tree," Reyes added. "You're a tricky fellow, Bannon."

"How is Luis Vélez doing?" Raquel asked.

"Oh, he'll be fine," Reyes said. "Now he just keeps talking. Hector Peña was *'la serpiente,'* the snake that destroyed his sister's purity."

"I'd be more inclined to say Peña stumbled through life like a drunken elephant," I said. "He hadn't the brains to be the snake."

## DID YOU MISS A KEY ISSUE? BACK ISSUES AVAILABLE

ALFRED  
**HITCHCOCK**  
MYSTERY MAGAZINE



LAST CHANCE TO UNLOCK MORE MYSTERIES IN ALFRED HITCHCOCK. CHECK OFF TODAY THE ALFRED HITCHCOCK BACK ISSUES THAT YOU'D LIKE, AND MAIL WITH YOUR CHECK OR MONEY ORDER. ORDERS TAKEN ON FIRST-COME, FIRST-SERVED BASIS. HURRY! LIMITED SUPPLY AVAILABLE.

ISSUES \$3.50 each

January 1986	<input type="checkbox"/>
February 1986	<input type="checkbox"/>
March 1986	<input type="checkbox"/>
April 1986	<input type="checkbox"/>
May 1986	<input type="checkbox"/>
June 1986	<input type="checkbox"/>
July 1986	<input type="checkbox"/>
August 1986	<input type="checkbox"/>
September 1986	<input type="checkbox"/>
October 1986	<input type="checkbox"/>
November 1986	<input type="checkbox"/>
December 1986	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mid-December 1986	<input type="checkbox"/>



ALFRED  
HITCHCOCK  
P.O. Box 40  
Vernon, NJ  
07462

☐ Enclosed is check or money order for \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
(Cost includes postage and handling)  
Make checks payable to **ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S  
MYSTERY MAGAZINE**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street/No. \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Please allow 4 to 6 weeks for delivery

DHG7BK

# UNSOLVED

by  
*Roger Hufford*

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?  
The answer will appear in the August issue.

Noah, sensing from the pain in his corns that bad weather was brewing, got one of his sons to help him build a boat, and the whole family went off on a trip. As with most vacationing families, they were constantly nagged by the worry that they had forgotten something. They talked about it all the time, and not always truthfully. No two of them, in fact, made the same number of true statements among the comments listed below. If I tell you that nobody made exactly three true statements, you should be able to resolve an important historical dilemma.

- Noah*
1. Shem forgot to lock the door.
  2. Ham helped me build the boat.
  3. My wife forgot to snuff the candles.
  4. The boys did not sneak any extra animals aboard.
- Mrs. Noah*
5. I snuffed all the candles.
  6. We put all the children on the ark.
  7. I turned off the major faucets.
  8. Shem locked the door.
- Shem*
9. We left my little sister at home.
  10. I locked the door.
  11. My brother and I sneaked extra cows aboard—for steaks.
  12. Ham is the oldest son.
- Ham*
13. I helped daddy build the boat.
  14. Momma forgot to turn off the major faucets.
  15. My brother and I sneaked extra cows aboard—for steaks.
  16. My brother is older than I am.

*Did Mrs. Noah remember to turn off the major faucets?*

---

See page 121 for the solution to the June puzzle.

*"The Famous Flash Flood," taken from Challenging Puzzles in Logic by Roger Hufford. Copyright © 1982 by Roger Hufford, Dover Publications, Inc., New York, N.Y.*

FICTION

# Song of the Open Road

by  
**Lorraine  
Collins**



**T**he eighteen wheeler was lying upside down like a dead canary in a cage, the cab doors propped open and hanging at crazy angles like broken wings. The cargo of paper products—napkins, paper towels, tissues, toilet paper—was scattered all up and down the embankment so it was a miracle that the fire that started hadn't wiped out half the county. If Jeb Withrow had missed that

curve on a dry night instead of a rainy one, it could have been worse than it was. Not worse for Jeb. He was smashed against the windshield, thrown out of the truck, and run over as it crashed through the brush into the ravine, killed instantly. The third one in a month along this road.

Sheriff Jansen couldn't understand it. There was no reason why there should be a



sudden outbreak of fatal truck accidents along this particular stretch of highway. Truckers had been using it for years to cut across country to get to the Interstate because it saved fifty miles. The road wound around rivers and cut through hill-sides, but it was no more dangerous than any other plain two lane highway. It was a scenic route, nice to drive if you weren't pushing a semi at top speed to get across the state. And just about every trucker who used it was plenty familiar with it because if they weren't, they wouldn't have been on it in the first place, wouldn't have known it was there. The transcontinental trucks that went from some place like Detroit to San Francisco never left the Interstate from one end of the country to the other.

After the highway patrol and the volunteer firemen had left, the sheriff walked up and down the road in the early morning light, waiting for the wrecker to come clean things up, waiting for his deputy to get back from town with some hot coffee, and looking for something, though he didn't know what. What was there to look for? Along a fifteen mile stretch of the highway that cut through the Indian Buttes to Willow Creek there had been three inexplicable truck accidents in the last thirty days, so he fig-

ured he should be looking for something. A man sixty-three years old, with forty years in law enforcement behind him, at least knew that much—to look for something when there didn't seem anything to look for.

Jeb Withrow's truck had left black rubber on a long stretch of road just at the curve, as if he had slammed his brakes on in a real panic and lost control. You could see where his cab had jerked this way and that, and he had suddenly driven straight over the embankment as though he expected to fly across the river. The highway patrol had measured everything, trying to figure out speed and distance, and they were going to get an autopsy to see whether Withrow had been drunk or had a heart attack or what. But Sheriff Jansen was remembering the other two accidents that month.

On another curve five or six miles back, an oil tanker had crashed through a guardrail about midnight one night and had flown straight off the side of a mountain into an old limestone quarry. Three miles beyond that one was the bridge where a flatbed hauling industrial machinery had smacked into the abutment and rolled into the dry riverbed. The curves were not particularly dangerous, the bridge not particularly narrow, and each of the drivers

had been over the route a lot of times before. Each accident had happened at night, but only one in the rain.

Well, of course they were all going too fast, because they always did go too fast, but they had never lost control before. When he had walked the length of a football field, Jansen stopped and turned to look back at the curve where Jeb Withrow had yanked his truck off the road and plunged to his death. The rain had stopped but the black highway glistened in the early light, and wisps of gray fog drifted in the air above the ravine, reflecting the pale sunlight so they looked like ghosts hanging there, little scraps of ectoplasm. That was just the sort of thought his deputy, Mike Wear, would love to hear him mention. Another sign that the old man was getting soft in the head.

When he started to walk back toward the scene of the accident, Jansen saw something out of the corner of his eye and turned to take a closer look. There was something just over the edge of the bank, a lump of something in the grass, and for a second he thought it was a bundle of clothes, and then he thought it was a body, but when he climbed over the guardrail and knelt in the wet grass, he saw what it was. A deer, just another dead animal like he

often saw along the highways. He had gotten used to the slaughter, and there wasn't much to be done about it. Maybe Withrow had hit the deer, and somehow lost control after that?

Jansen stood up, pushing his hat back on his head, looking at the deer. A two point buck, still in the velvet, a beautiful animal, but dead longer than a few hours. It had been smashed by some vehicle, but not Jeb Withrow's. It was curious, the way the deer lay there half buried in the mud, and Jansen wondered whether rain flowing down the embankment had pushed dirt around it so it was partly buried, or whether it had washed the dirt away, uncovering the deer from a shallow grave. But who would ever think a thought like that? Nobody buried deer killed on the highway. Sometimes they were carted off to the landfill if somebody happened to come along to take care of them, but mostly they just stayed there and provided food for the buzzards. Just too bad, but that's the way it was.

The sheriff climbed back over the railing and was still standing there when his deputy got back. Mike saw where he was, so he drove on up to the road to bring him the coffee. He would be mad about that, running the errand, but since they had to wait for the wrecker they might

as well have breakfast. One of those sticky rolls from the bakery, and coffee. When Mike got out of the car and handed him the styrofoam cup, his grin wasn't exactly insolent, but almost.

"What ya doing up here, sheriff? Admiring the sunrise?" Mike liked to needle him about being dreamy-eyed and absent-minded, but he wasn't really that way. Just a little slower. The trouble was, Mike was impatient and had a high opinion of his own ability, and was getting up his courage to run against him in the next election. He kept talking about progress and technology and how they should learn to think scientifically. It seemed that his deputy was trying to convince him he was too old for the job.

"What do you make of that, Mike?" Jansen asked him as he sipped his coffee. Wear looked at the half-buried animal and shrugged. "Dead deer," he said.

It wasn't until the middle of the night that Jansen really started to think about it. He woke up suddenly, not knowing why, which was something else he often did these days, and the first thing he thought of was the deer. He lay in bed listening to the soft sounds of night—his wife's peaceful breathing, the hum of the electric clock, the

rustle of tree branches in the breeze—and he thought of the half-buried deer and of those trucks suddenly veering from the highway, plunging down embankments in fiery crashes on nights just as quiet and ordinary as this one. It wasn't logical, but what if there was a connection, not only between the three accidents, but between them and the deer that somebody had taken the trouble to bury? When you've got two or three things that don't make a whole lot of sense, you might as well think about them all at the same time. He decided that he should probably go back and take another look at those other two crash sites.

**I**n the morning he found another deer buried beside the road, not far from where the tanker dived off the highway into the quarry. Then he spent a long time looking around the bridge where the flatbed truck had crashed. There was a great scatteration of hawk feathers along the approach, but that wasn't exactly unusual. Hawks were often around the riverbed looking for food, swooping under the bridge and soaring over it, and every now and then they were hit by vehicles. The sheriff looked up at the bright sky, shading his eyes with his hand, and he could see some hawks wheeling overhead

right then, circling, watching, maybe waiting for him to get out of the way. They were beautiful birds, if you weren't a field mouse. Hawks and golden eagles, riding on air currents, soaring and free—he had always loved to watch them when he was a boy. The eagles were all gone now, but at least the hawks were still there, surviving. So far, so good. If they didn't get too close to the traffic.

Sheriff Jansen searched carefully by the side of the road, and then decided that the best place to look was under the bridge. He moved slowly, stopping now and then to turn the earth over gently with the trenching tool he always carried in his car. Eventually he found what he thought he might: some hawks buried there, two or three of them. After he found them, he sat in his chair by the bridge for quite a long time, watching and thinking, beginning to feel the first tug of a notion, something that might become an idea if he was patient with it.

He could hear meadowlarks singing and insects whirring in the prairie grass, all the pleasant, lazy sounds of a peaceful countryside. But there was traffic, too. This time of day there was quite a bit of traffic, but at night everybody who lived around here was in bed, so maybe that was why those wrecks were at night. At night

there would usually be just the big trucks. While the sheriff sat there, three farm trucks went by with the drivers waving at him as they rattled on over the bridge, and then came the station wagon driven by the rural mail carrier. The sheriff knew every one of them, as they all knew him. That was an advantage. It was something that should make this easy to figure out. If there really was something to figure out.

Finally a semi trailer truck came blasting down the road toward him, with the driver noticing just a little too late that there was a law officer sitting there, so he tried to slow down, but he was still doing sixty-five when he got to the bridge. The truck roared by, pushing the air around it, sending chipmunks scurrying for cover and making birds scream and flap wildly away. The smell of diesel fuel hung in the shimmering air.

Mike would have gone chasing after it, siren blowing, lights flashing. The sheriff called the highway patrol on his radio to give them the numbers so they could catch it down the road, and then he sat there and watched the truck disappear until the exhaust was just a gray smudge gradually blending with the sky, and peace was restored.

Trucks like that annoyed a lot of people. They ruined the

road so it cost the county money, and they killed the animals, and they made a lot of stink, a lot of noise. The song of the open road wasn't what it used to be in the old days, all right. But you'd have to be more than just annoyed to start fighting back. And if you wanted to, how would you do it? The sheriff started his car and drove slowly on up the road to the junction, and then back down again, thinking of the names on the mailboxes, and who the people were who lived at the end of country lanes—farmers raising beans and grain, feeding a few cattle, some with big sheep operations, one or two growing sugar beets. Not a one of them would bury a deer, mourn a hawk, or try to run a truck off the road.

What about kids, young people? Might be some new game of chicken, or maybe some gang . . . not around here. Around here were boys who joined the Future Farmers of America and played volleyball on Sunday afternoons at the community hall. But still, somebody was doing something.

The more he thought about it, the more sure he was that somebody had all of a sudden gone crazy or got mad.

Sheriff Jansen drove down the road until he came to what was called the Old Watson Place,

even though Jesse Webb had lived there ever since he retired from the Highway Department. Jesse lived in the house and tended the orchard and fed some chickens, but the rest of the place was rented out to the neighbors for hay and corn. He thought maybe he would just ask Jesse about the road, and what was going on, because he lived right there where he could see everything, and he sure knew the road. Yeah, he sure knew the road.

That was something to pay attention to. The sheriff turned into the driveway and decided he should circle around the yard to stop out back by the machine shed. He was beginning to think scientifically, like his deputy said, thinking of means and opportunity. As he got out of the car and walked slowly toward the back door of the house, he made a point of looking inside the shed, without seeming to be too interested.

Jesse was watching him from the kitchen window, and he hadn't come out to say, "Well, howdy, sheriff. What brings you out this way? Want a cup of coffee?" That's what he should be saying. They'd known each other for years. They'd been out in blizzards together opening up the roads and getting people out of cars stuck in snowbanks. Jesse would drive the big snow-

plow, breaking way for the sheriff's four-wheel drive. But now there Jesse stood, peering out of the kitchen window, watching him walk toward the door, knowing what he'd seen in the shed. All that was left to find out now was motive.

They talked about it on the way back to town. Jesse's dog Blondie, that beautiful golden lab, had been run over one night, just before she was going to have pups. She looked so sad, before she died. Worried. All the pups died, too. Four of them. There were going to be four of them, and he would have kept at least one, so Blondie and he would both have more company on the place. But that eighteen wheeler just bounced her off the road and kept on going. He buried her on the place there, and then he started doing the same for everything else he saw that was murdered on the highway. They should at least get a decent burial. And then he got the idea. Bring some peace back, protect the roads, teach them a lesson. He hadn't really thought about killing people, the drivers. He was just getting rid of the trucks.

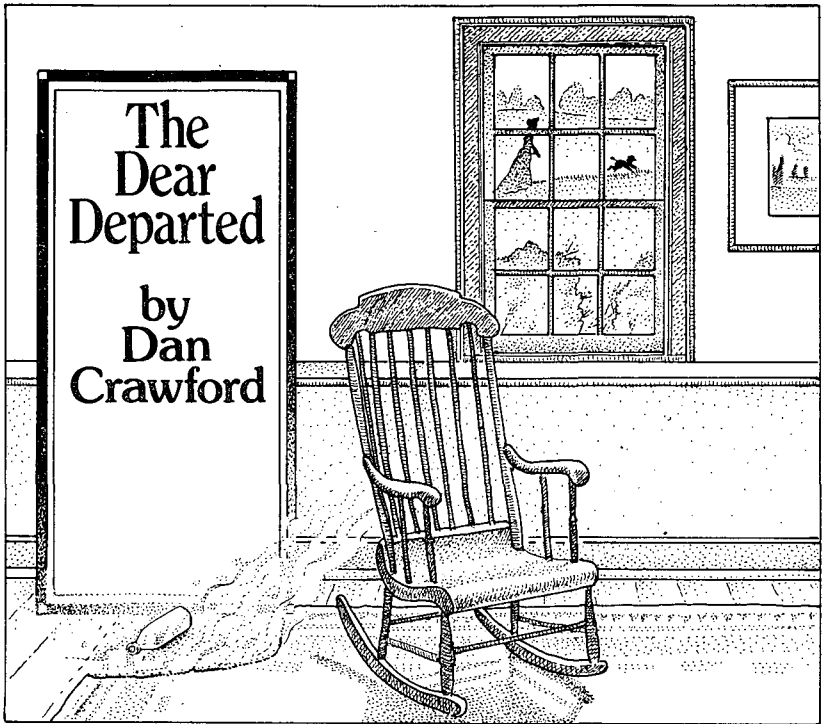
The sheriff let Jesse Webb talk all the way back to town, listening to him ramble, thinking that somehow Jesse had gotten real old. He hadn't re-

alized it because the old guy was still lean and spry and strong, but Jesse had changed into an excitable old man with just one idea, one fixation. Seasons come and go, people change. "How did you get the stuff from the county shop?" the sheriff asked him somewhere along the line.

"Easy. I worked there forty-three years." He'd taken barricades and signs and flares, *Danger*, *Detour*, and had rigged up a whole bank of bright work lights that were blinding when you turned them on. It wasn't hard to put that stuff together so he could slap it on the highway and get it off again, and when the trucks got almost to where everything was set out, going about seventy miles an hour on a dark night, he'd turn it all on. It took surprise, and it took timing and some luck, and once he almost got run over, but those guys would get scared and confused and jerk their rigs right off the road when they faced something unexpected like that. Pick the right spot, and bingo.

"Just how long did you expect to keep on doing that, Jesse?"

The old man shrugged. "Oh, long as I could. Till you came along anyway. I knew you'd be around here sooner or later. A man like you notices things."



I always knew her footstep. Or actually, because there was carpet on the floor, I knew the sound of her legs and skirt as she walked. So I knew she was there long before she said anything. "Rebecca?" she said, gently, "Rebecca, are you there?"

"Yes, Aunt Rose," I called back, loud enough for her to hear it. "Yes." I turned around and saw her standing by the butcher block table. She was wearing her grey outfit, and both pairs of glasses hung around her neck. She looked vaguely worried, as she almost always did.

"I don't like to disturb you, dear," she said. "But there seems to be someone in my room. I don't mean that. I mean there seems to have been someone in my room. Things have been moved around, and so on. Would you come look at it?"

I didn't get up. "I know, Aunt Rose," I said. "She, er, works here."



She did move some things around, but she told me about them, and I checked to be sure she didn't take anything."

"Oh," she said, not quite reassured. "She does? I see. Yes. Are you sure?"

"Yes, Aunt Rose," I told her.

"My, my," she replied, "works here, you say." She seemed to be fading a little and I hoped she would continue before Paul heard me.

Of course I had to speak up so she could make out what I was saying and, also of course, Paul came bursting in from his workroom. "Are you here again?" he demanded, seeing his aunt. "Go back where you belong!"

Fortunately, he was too far away for her to make out the words, but she could see he was upset. She waved her hand fondly, smiled at me to show that we shared our trials in dealing with this lovable but not entirely sensible child, and vanished.

"Damn it all, what did she want this time?" he demanded, coming up the hall.

"Someone has been in her room, moving things," I answered, demurely.

"I should think so," he snapped; unmoved. Chamois had the misfortune to amble into the room at this point.

"And, as for you . . ." Paul began, turning on him.

"Oh, don't pick on the dog," I ordered. I do try to be soothing and understanding, but I'm new at it.

"Oh, it's a dog, is it?" Paul demanded, watching the little black poodle through narrowed eyes. Chamois was headed for the butcher block table. "I thought it was a large cockroach."

Chamois raised a leg and Paul stooped down like avenging Jupiter and dealt him a hard slap just behind the head. "And if he doesn't mind his manners, I'm going to get a cat!" Chamois rolled back, looked up at Paul, and wagged his tail. He didn't know what the game was, but he was willing to play. Paul snarled and stormed back to his workroom.

Chamois is Aunt Rose's dog. Paul and I have a basic disagreement about him. I think he's cute. Paul thinks he should be run through a sausage grinder. Of course, he's known Chamois longer than I have.

His Aunt Rose had no children, and had lived with Paul and Chamois for twelve years. Then she died. I am not quite sure what happened after that. Paul, who is up on this sort of thing, says that she was so vague by that time that she didn't know quite what to

do. Unable to realize that she was dead and buried, she had simply returned to the apartment to live as she always had.

In the ensuing year, he had attended a comic book convention, where I met him, and so on and so forth. The courtship was fairly normal, thank you, once I learned on his system of values I was only 9.5 out of a possible ten. Copper-bound books on magic and mysticism came in at 9.65. We were married and we had just about reached the point at which he trusted me to go into his workroom, escorted by him. It is full of braziers and incense and elderly books and has a not-quite-clean look about it. I do not offer criticism. I have to work up another fifteen-hundredths of a point first.

I had known I was marrying a sorcerer, of course. Paul was too much of a gentleman to let me find it out after the wedding. He even let me watch as he conjured up our rings out of a smoking bowl of water and rue. He said it came from Atlantis, and the rings were Atlantean work, too. I believed him. At least I couldn't see "Hong Kong" stamped on them anywhere, and mine never turned my finger green or orange or any other color. And he had no objection to being married like normal people, with a regular license and church ceremony. I had had visions of having to tell my parents to meet us in the cemetery at midnight and bring a shovel.

So I was really not overly upset to find that our bedroom was haunted by Aunt Rose. She was a dear, departed soul, and she had a tendency to appear during daylight, just before lunch and just after supper. This made things easy to arrange.

But Paul found her infuriating, and her little dog, too. I had the presence of mind not to ask why he didn't use his magic to banish her. He had explained to me, while we were dating, that a magician can't do everything he wants to, even if he has the power. I accepted that. It is rather a mature, adult concept, and I'm proud of it. A child assumes that an adult can do lots of things but just won't, out of a sheerly perverse contrariness. As a child, I had planned to move to a jungle, live in a tree, wear leopard skins, and be a friend to all animals. (I don't know where I thought I'd get the leopard skins.) When I got older, I learned about malaria, and passports, and snakes, and so on. Nothing, of course, was stopping me from going off to a jungle; I had just noticed numerous logical reasons not to do so. I think it works that way with magic.

Chamois barked and ran to the door. "Hush!" ordered Paul.

Chamois, of course, did not hush, particularly when someone began to smack the knocker against the door. The sound always drove the little dog frantic.

"I said, 'Hush!'" bellowed Paul, emerging from the workroom again. He swatted the dog away from the door. "This is for me, I think," he said, turning the bolt.

"Yes," he went on, pulling the door open, "Dr. Young, is it?"

I went over as a tall man with a briefcase entered. Chamois was still barking. This was unusual, since Chamois seemed to feel that once a person had actually entered the apartment, his responsibility had ended. I grabbed him up, carried him to the bathroom, dropped him into the tub, which was too tall for him to jump out of, and shut the door.

When I got back, Paul was chatting with his visitor. "This is Dr. Young," he told me. "My wife, Rebecca. Dr. Young is what you might call an exorcist. I called to see if he could help with Aunt Rose."

"I thought exorcists only dealt with evil spirits," I said.

"Okay," answered Paul, "then don't call him an exorcist."

"Perhaps it would be better to call me a removal expert," said Dr. Young, smiling. "I take unwanted ghosts away from the spots they haunt. Or, if you want to, you can call me a Ghostbuster, if you promise not to sing." He smiled to show his teeth.

I didn't like him. I can't say why. His suit was clean and pressed, much nicer than any of Paul's suits. His hair was neat and unobjectionable. His teeth were white and even but not white and even enough to be obnoxious. His briefcase had a battered, comfortable look about it, and his shoes were neat but not newly-shined. He wore a plain blue tie with a simple tie clasp. He looked like a thousand people you meet on the street.

But there was something about him that made me think of frog claws.

"Now, what I do, Mr. Sangesoxe," he said, turning back to Paul, "is less a matter of exorcism than simple removal. I just take the ghost that's causing you trouble, get it into a bottle like this," he opened the briefcase and brought out a small green bottle about the size of one of those screwtop bottles that come in sixpacks, "and take it away with me."

"What do you do with it then?" I inquired.

"Why, that's a little difficult to explain," said Dr. Young, smiling again.

"And not really any of our business," Paul broke in. "I'll show you the room where she appears most often." He took Dr. Young by the elbow and hurried him toward the bedroom, with the bottle.

I turned to follow, but stopped and looked back at Dr. Young's

briefcase. I am not nosy, as a rule (I tell myself), but if I'm going to be a good wife to a sorcerer, I ought to take every opportunity to learn. (I told myself.) So, making sure that Dr. Young and Paul were out of the hall, I knelt quickly and unlatched the briefcase.

I didn't learn much there. There were two long rods, a bundle of leaves, and three neat rows of empty bottles, held in place with straps. I was reaching down to open a bottle, to see if it was really empty, when I was suddenly hit by one of those fierce, hot itches. You know the kind; it strikes in the middle of your back when you're eating out at the Chateau de Dumpling and you sit there and wiggle because you were taught never to scratch in public.

This itch hit me in five places at once, most of them unmentionable. At the same time, I was suddenly aware of a pressing need to run into the bathroom. I snapped the briefcase shut and made a quick dash. My hand was on the zipper when I noticed Chamois. I was always the self-conscious type and, though aware of the foolishness of it (after all, I always watched him when he was doing it), I lifted him out of the tub and shut him outside.

I should have known that he would head straight for his usual spot under the bed. There was a tumult of shouting and barking and, as I expected, a cry of "Rebecca!"

I zipped up and ran out. Dr. Young had a small portable brazier set up, and several leaves dangled from his hands as he tried to hop out of reach. Chamois was running around his feet, nipping at magic ankles in green socks.

"I'll get him!" I called, noticing that Paul had picked up a large bookend. "He usually doesn't behave this way, doctor."

"Can you take him, too?" Paul demanded as I swooped down and just missed the little beggar. "Don't bother with anything mystic; just stuff him in a bottle."

"Be careful, Mrs. Sangesoxe!" shouted the doctor. "Don't spill . . ."

I think he was going to say, "Don't spill the brazier." Because, before he got to "the," that's what I did. Whatever was in the thing splashed away from me, burning into the carpet, searing the doctor's suit, and sizzling among Chamois's matted hair. The doctor and Chamois howled alike. Paul said something not quite nice. I said something similar, but less arcane.

Acrid smoke filled the room, and Paul said something I didn't follow. A breeze came up (the windows were closed) and the smoke vanished.

With it, apparently, went Dr. Young, the brazier, and Chamois. A large chunk of the carpet seemed to have been bitten away, too.

"Rats!" said Paul.

I looked around the room, not seeing much. "I . . . I'm sorry," I said.

Paul came across the room and put his arms around me. "It isn't your fault," he said, in what, for Paul, is a gentle voice. "It was that damn . . ."

"Paul?" inquired a soft tone.

Paul froze in position, took a deep breath, and turned around. He did not shout, which showed marvelous control. But every word was a separate bark. "What do you want, Aunt Rose?"

She understood that he was vexed about something, and stepped back. "Are you busy?" she asked. "I don't want to bother you if you're busy."

Paul took another long breath. "No, Aunt Rose," he said. "What is it?"

"I can't find little Chamois," she told him. "Have you seen him?"

I would not have blamed Paul at all for what I could tell he was about to say. Before he could say it, a little phantom ran up by Aunt Rose's feet and rubbed its head on her ankle. It was Chamois, of course, a slightly different Chamois. He wasn't as grey as he had been, and his hair was less matted and tangled. His eyes were bright and his tongue pink and cheerful.

"There you are, little Chamois," she said, bending over to pick him up. "Good little Chamois."

When she touched him, the little black dog jumped away from her. "Where are you going, Chamois?" she demanded. "Where are you . . . come back here, baby. Come back." But he had vanished.

She looked at us. "Now he's gone off again," she said. "Do you see him?"

"No," said Paul.

I pulled away from him and ran to the closet. "Here, Aunt Rose," I said, handing her a little chain. "You'd better put his leash on him before he gets in someone's way."

She took it from me. "Oh, yes," she said. She was suddenly cheerful, with something to do, "Yes, yes, I will. I'll find him." She turned away from us and disappeared.

We have not seen her since that day. We hope, in fact we believe, that she has at last gone to where little dogs are free to bark and nephews never do. What became of Dr. Young doesn't really interest me.

FICTION

# Deceptions

by Ken  
Denbow



Illustration by George Thompson

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

“I never go on picnics,” whined Chrissy.

“Shut up and get in the car,” his mother said, frantically pushing the four-year-old into the baby seat. “You’ve been on lots of picnics.”

“But why are we going on a picnic in the dark?”

Pam tried to keep her voice from betraying the panic. “This is a new kind of picnic that only happens at night.”

“But it’s raining. I’ll get all wet on the teeter-totter.”

“No, dear, we’ll go to Gramma’s house and you won’t get wet there. We’ll have the picnic inside.” Pam regretted the lame excuse she had used to get Chrissy up and in the car. But how could anyone expect her to think straight when she had just shot her husband?

“But Gramma didn’t say anything about a picnic when I was there this afternoon.” Chrissy fought sleep as he slumped forward in the baby seat.

Pam started the car and spun the tires as she pulled away from the house. Despite her resolve not to, she looked back. Was that a form at the window? No, it couldn’t be, he was dead! He had to be dead! She’d seen the impact of the bullets as she fired again and again until the revolver clicked on an empty chamber. She had smelled

burning fabric as the final shot was fired at point blank range. She fought the rise of hysteria as the remembered fear flooded her memory.

She jumped when Chrissy’s voice broke into her thoughts. “Mommy, why isn’t Daddy with us?”

“He has other things to do tonight, remember? He’s all the way across the country in Los Angeles at the convention.”

Yes, other things like lie in a pool of blood on our bedroom floor, she told herself. Why wasn’t he in Los Angeles and she still at home asleep?

The car skidded as she braked in front of her mother’s house. Grabbing Chrissy, she ran to the door, frantically banging on it until she saw the light come on in the bedroom.

“Mom, please keep Chrissy. I’ve got problems at home. I’ll tell you more later,” she said, handing Chrissy to the startled woman. “Chrissy, you be good and I’ll be back for you in the morning.”

“But . . .” her mother tried to say as Pam ran back to the car.

Pam’s panic lessened as she headed back toward the house. It was accidental, she repeated over and over in her mind. “I’ll call the police. They’ll realize it was accidental. Even with



the half million dollar insurance policy they couldn't think it was murder. Even with all the fights we've been having lately. Everybody knew John had a terrible temper. They have to believe it was an accident!" Pam found she was speaking aloud in the dark loneliness of the car. She was not surprised to find tears streaming from her eyes.

She parked in the circular drive. Automatically she locked the car doors, using the electric locks. At the door of the house, her hand trembled as she inserted the key. She walked down the long hall to the bedroom phone to call the police. John lay where he had fallen, on his right side, with his head turned. His left eye stared unseeingly at her as she dialed 911. As the phone rang, she wished she had used the phone in the kitchen rather than following habit and using the one in the bedroom. There would have been no accusing eye staring at her from the kitchen.

While she waited for the police to arrive, she looked self-consciously around the room. She had an urge to make the bed and pick up her nightgown lying on the floor where she had hurriedly thrown it. Was the rest of the house a mess? Should she worry about it with John lying dead on the floor?

Dave Martin was feeling his fifty-two years as he rang the bell. While he waited for an answer, he glanced around at the neatly trimmed yard, the trees surrounding the house, and the paved circular drive with its pretense of elegance. He knew the house would be priced in the mid-sixties anywhere but in the Washington area. He also knew it would be nearly two hundred thousand here.

"I'm Detective Dave Martin," he announced, showing his badge to the tall and attractive woman who peered through the slightly opened door. "May we come in?"

Pam fumbled with the door chain. "Please do. I'm Mrs. Sadowski. He's down this way," she said, leading the way through the foyer to the hallway.

Three other men followed Martin into the house. Pam led the entourage to the bedroom, and stepped back as the efficiently organized team photographed the body and the bedroom. With equipment which seemed to materialize from the briefcases they carried, they systematically started dusting, examining, feeling the body, and taking volumes of notes while the detective shuffled up to her.

"Now, please tell us what

happened," Martin said, pulling a battered notebook from his rumpled sportcoat pocket.

Pam told of John's departure at Dulles to fly to Los Angeles for his conference, the late departure so he could spend the day with the family and get a little rest after the very late party last night. She continued with what he had packed. Then the drive to the airport and the kiss goodbye as she dropped him off at the departure ramp. She told of his plans to be back in six days to be home in time for the Saturday afternoon football game. She told of the horror of waking up to see the huge form approaching the bed, silhouetted against the bedroom window. Her hands shook as she told of reaching into the nightstand drawer, taking out the revolver, and shooting until the chambers were empty. Martin listened impassively, making notes in his notebook.

When she finished, he asked to see the revolver. Pam opened the nightstand drawer and handed the Smith and Wesson .38 to the detective.

"Did you fire all five shots tonight?" Martin asked as he noted the five expended cartridges.

"Yes. It's the first time I've shot the thing in almost a year. John makes me shoot it at least once a year just in case something like this should happen."

Pam's voice trembled as tears flooded her eyes. "But I never thought it would be him!"

"No one ever does, ma'am, in an accidental shooting," Martin said sympathetically.

"This is Detective Kevin Sarnik," Martin said, turning to the young, well-dressed man who walked up. "He's my partner. Kevin, this is Mrs. Sadowski."

Sarnik acknowledged the introduction with a nod of his head.

Then, turning to Martin, he said, "Evidently the deceased came in the front door. There's no sign of forced entry anywhere." Sarnik consulted his notebook and continued. "We found a pair of wet shoes in the foyer that look like they might fit him, and there was a key ring lying on the table above the shoes. This key fits the door and turns the lock. The back door has a locked dead bolt, and all the windows seem to have key locks on them. Whole place looks about as secure as you can make a house like this."

"That was John's idea," Pam broke in. "He had one of your officers out to do a security survey when you had the big campaign on television."

"Nice to see at least some people follow through after the surveys," Sarnik said, smiling at her.

Turning back to his partner, he continued. "The body has three wounds, look like .38 caliber holes. Last shot was fired from very close range. Powder burns on his shirt. Slug hit him right in the sternum, from the looks of things. At least one round went through a window pane, and we also have one apparently in the wall next to the windows. Also found this in his hand."

Martin heard Pam gasp as Sarnik handed him a .32 caliber automatic and a loaded clip.

"This round was in the chamber, and the hammer was back," Sarnik added, offering the round to Martin. "Wonder it didn't go off when he was shot."

"He always carry a gun?" the detective asked, returning the automatic to Sarnik.

"Never, or at least not that I know of. The revolver here is the only handgun we own."

"Guy only had his billfold and this airline ticket in his pocket. No keys, change, or anything else that might make noise when he walked." Sarnik offered the ticket folder and the billfold to Martin.

Martin looked at the ticket folder. "Didn't you say your name was Sodlowski?"

"Yes."

"This ticket is for Smith, John Smith. And the ticket is for a flight which leaves two hours from now, at three. Does your

husband usually travel under another name?"

"No, not that I know of." Pam's face showed confusion. "He's quite proud of being Polish. And he left on the six P.M. flight out of Dulles. I dropped him off myself. He was there at least an hour ahead of the flight. We left here at four thirty, and it's not even twenty minutes to Dulles."

"Did you actually see him get on the plane?"

"No, but he *must* have!" Pam's voice started to rise, but she quickly controlled it. "Actually, all I saw him do was check his bag with the curbside people. Then he came and kissed me goodbye and I left."

"Then why does he have this guy Smith's ticket for a later flight?"

"But he always takes the six P.M. flight to Los Angeles when he goes. He usually drives himself out, but his car had to go to the shop for some kind of work yesterday. And he always likes to be early because that flight's normally full."

"Ma'am, is there any reason he might have wanted to do you harm?"

Martin watched shock, and then a look of growing horror on the woman's face as she grasped what he had said.

"No more than I would for killing him. The only reason I can think of is the insurance

policies we took out on each of us," she said in a gush of words. She didn't add that it might be so he could run off with the slut he called a secretary. Let them find out about that little blonde bitch on their own time.

**"L**ieutenant, it sure looks like this guy tried to kill his wife, and tried to use a trip to L.A. as an alibi," Martin finished the recounting of the case to date.

"How the hell can you make an assumption like that?" Derri-son's deceptively quiet voice came from behind a cloud of blue cigar smoke that masked the ferociousness of his heavy-browed face. "You haven't even talked to the airline people, or anyone else who knew anything about this case. How the hell do you know the missus isn't lying through her teeth?"

Dave Martin again described the events of last night. "This gal was upset. She gave me the impression of someone that didn't understand what had happened. When I hinted that her husband might've wanted to kill her, the expression on her face was a classic. Either she'd practiced it for weeks, or it was genuine."

"That may well be, but I want this thing checked out, and checked out right." Clouds of cigar smoke punctuated the

statement. "What about Sodalowski? What did he do for a living?"

Kevin Sarnik answered the question. "He's an ex-navy officer, working now for a civilian contractor with offices out on the beltway. Engineer on some sort of navy space contract. Typical beltway bandit. Makes about fifty thousand, but has house, car, and credit card payments that eat up everything he makes. Age thirty-two, married Pamela Marie Marsten. Met her while in the navy at Norfolk. She's age thirty, college graduate, and is a housewife by profession."

"At least you checked out some of the basic facts," Derri-son said sarcastically. "Now get out there and find out what the hell happened, just like real detectives."

"Lieutenant's in a good mood today, isn't he?" Kevin ventured as they headed back to the detective section.

**"Y**es, sir, J. Sodalowski was assigned seat 17C.

We still have the ticket stub and the boarding pass."

"Are you sure it was this man?" Martin asked the aging flight-attendant-turned-ticket-taker as he held out a picture of Sodalowski.

"I really don't remember

faces . . . they all seem to run together after a while. I do remember, though, that the flight was not full, for a change. We were able to get all the standby passengers on, and still had a few empty seats."

"But you can't remember specifically if Mr. Sodlowski got on that airplane?"

"No, I can't say for sure. Here at Dulles we load the passengers onto people movers like those buses over there, and they haul them out to the aircraft at the mid-field terminal."

"Could he have gotten off the people mover between here and the airplane?"

"Not really."

"Could he have not gotten on the people mover once he gave the ticket to you?"

"I suppose. We don't really look for people who don't get on the bus. Our concern is more for those who get on without a ticket. That's why the stewards on the aircraft check boarding passes, too."

"How many passengers does the aircraft hold?"

"Flight 381 would have been configured for a full load, four hundred twenty-eight total."

"Do you have figures as to how many actually were on the flight?"

"I think it will still be in the computer." With skillful fingers she called up the data on Flight 381. "Our tally through

here was four twenty-four. The girls reported the same."

Martin felt a sense of frustration as he scratched his thinning hair. "But one of your passengers managed to get himself killed here in Reston while that plane was in the air. You sure the totals are the same?"

The girl threw back her head and laughed. "You ever try to count four hundred twenty-eight people on an airplane when half of them aren't even in their seats? The girls always get the same head count as we do, and it has nothing to do with the number of people on board."

Martin closed his notebook and shoved it into the back pocket of his shapeless trousers. "Well, thank you, ma'am. I don't know for sure what I found out, but I appreciate your time."

"Any time, detective. Will I be called as a witness or get a TV interview?"

"Maybe, if this turns out to be something other than an accidental killing."

Martin patiently waited as Pam released the safety chain from the door to let him in. She led the way into the inexpensively but tastefully decorated living room. She offered him an overstuffed chair as she smoothed her black dress over her long legs and sat on the

sofa. Like the room, her mourning outfit showed excellent taste on a constrained budget, from the black shoes to the black ribbon drawing her long, reddish brown hair back into a tight knot.

"Please excuse the mess," Pam said, waving at the cluttered student desk in the corner. "Just doing my monthly chore of paying the bills. Now, what can I do for you?"

"Ma'am, it looks like there was a good chance someone else posed as your husband getting on that airplane Sunday night, or he somehow either got on and right off or ducked out after checking in," Martin began, relating his experience with the airline. "No one checked into his hotel in L.A., or picked up his rental car at the L.A. airport. We also checked, and either someone picked up his baggage in L.A., or it never got on the airplane either."

"But why didn't he go?" Pam asked. Pausing, she then added, "But I saw him check the baggage. The skycap put it on the cart, and stapled the claim checks to the ticket folder. Or at least it looked like he did."

"Then someone must have picked it up at the other end, I guess. Any idea who that could have been?"

"No!" Pam almost shouted the word. "Are you saying he had an accomplice?"

Her reaction surprised Martin. "No, it's just that we don't know yet what happened to his baggage." Changing the subject, he continued. "We also checked with the garage you told us about. You husband didn't take his car there. We did find it about four blocks from here, though, parked in among some trees. When did he say he took it to the garage?"

"It was sometime while Chrissy and I were shopping. We didn't get home till after seven."

"We didn't find any luggage inside the car, but we did find a receipt for the Dulles parking lot from six P.M. Saturday to seven P.M. Sunday. There was also a machine ticket that showed he entered the parking lot at four fifty-five P.M. on Sunday. Looks like he parked it there Saturday so he could use it to come back Sunday. Somehow, he got the machine to give him a second ticket so he could establish the time he got to Dulles on Sunday. But since you dropped him off at about four-fifty, he must have had an accomplice get it."

"My God," Pam moaned.

"We also looked at his shoes in the lab. Mud found on his shoes matches the soil samples around where the car was parked. It looks to me like he came back for something, and given the gun he was carrying,

"I'd guess it was to assault you, ma'am. Were you and he having problems of any kind?"

Pam's eyes filled with tears as she related John's coolness towards her; the lonely nights not knowing where he was until the early hours of the morning; John's insistence on taking out the twin five hundred thousand dollar insurance policies on each other. She told of seeing John and someone called Glenda together, her blonde head leaning on his shoulder, totally unaware of the shocked woman and the four-year-old boy who had stopped into the out-of-the-way cocktail lounge to use the bathroom. Martin was slightly embarrassed as the tautly held voice poured out the litany of a woman whose husband was cheating.

When she finished, he changed the subject by saying, "We finally traced that gun your husband was carrying. He bought it about six months ago. Registered it all nice and legal."

"But I've never seen it before," Pam cried.

"Salesman remembered selling it to him. Evidently he's bought ammunition and weapons there before."

"That must be Mitch's Gun Shop."

"Right. Richards was the salesman. He said your husband said the gun was for pro-

tection of the house. In fact, Richards said your husband said the gun was for you—that the .38 was too heavy for you to handle. He was even under the impression you had asked your husband to get it for you. If you haven't seen it around the house, is there anyplace else he could have kept it? Like at the office or in the car?"

"Not at the office, not the way his boss feels about guns. The car . . . I doubt it. He's very aware of the penalties for carrying a concealed weapon in the car, and always insists on having any gun in plain sight on a seat."

"He must have kept it somewhere. Possibly it may have been left with the accomplice until he needed it."

"Accomplice?" Pam asked. "You keep saying accomplice. Do you mean he had help to try to kill me?"

"We don't know yet, ma'am. Can you think of anyone who might help him?"

"No! I don't know of anyone who would want me dead."

"Looks like someone did, ma'am. Guess we'll have to keep looking till we find out who it is." Martin stood and started for the door. "I guess that's about it for now. I'll be in touch as we find out more."

Pam led the way to the door, taking off the safety chain to let the detective out. "But why



would he register a gun if he meant to kill me with it?"

Martin ran his fingers through the remains of what had been a shock of red hair, now turned grey. "I don't know. Maybe he thought we would think the assailant took the gun from the nightstand drawer and shot you with it, which is probably about what we'd have assumed with him in Los Angeles and all. And particularly with the gun salesman telling us you had asked your husband to get it for you. By the way, when did you say you and your husband took out those insurance policies?"

"About six months ago."

"About the time he bought the gun. Do you suppose it's a coincidence?" Martin asked as he turned and left.

**“W**ell, Kevin, what did you find out?"

"Not much.

Pathology has found some traces of a drug with a name a mile long. A real upper. Something the crosscountry truckers take to stay awake. It's illegal, but you can get it at any truck stop. Looks like Sodlowski wanted to be wide awake and alert. From what I got from the neighbors, he probably needed it after all the booze he tied into the night before."

"Yeah, I suppose. Hate to

sleep through killing your wife."

"Could be a real chance of that if he took the pills too early. According to the doc, those things turn into the best sleeping pills in the world once the upper wears off. Damn things work by stimulating adrenaline, but once they wear off the effect goes the other way, and whoever took them seems to move in slow motion and can't stay awake. Almost no warning when they wear off. That's why they're so illegal." Kevin flipped to a new page in his notebook. "I also checked out that other ticket. It wasn't bought through the company travel agent but through one over in Crystal City. Paid for in cash when it was picked up by his secretary."

"Did you talk to her?"

"Yeah. Name's Glenda Waiteclif. What a blonde bombshell. Short gal, but stacked. About the ticket, though, she said she didn't order it or pick it up."

"You think she was lying?"

"Beats me. But she was sure upset about him being killed. Said 'that bitch of a wife of his murdered him' or something like that. She never quite admitted to having an affair with her boss, but I'd bet my bottom dollar on it."

"She'll probably not admit it, particularly if it looks like she'll be an accessory to attempted

murder if it works out like I think this case is working out. Find out anything else?"

"Well, I talked to a Dan Fodorinic. He's worked with Sodlowski for a long time. He says that the deceased had quite a way with the women. Seemed to prefer blondes, particularly tall ones with platinum hair. He gave me the names of a couple of his more recent flings. Maybe the secretary isn't the only help he had on this. A Rhonda Brendon, who's on a trip to the West Coast right now, and a Mary Johannson are two that Fodorinic named. Waiteclif didn't know anything about either of the other two gals. In fact, almost seemed upset at the implication that there was anyone else that Sodlowski was interested in."

"Well, Waiteclif is the only one we've got right now," Martin said, rising. "Let's take her over to see the travel agent."

"Nope. That's not the lady who was here. Her hair is about the same color and style, but she's shorter than the woman who picked up the ticket."

"You sure?" asked Kevin as he turned Glenda to give the old man a different view of the woman.

"Hey, buddy, we don't get goodlookers like that in here too often. . . . I'd remember!" The man's eyes lit up with a

lust his body must have lost years ago. "The lady what picked up the ticket was almost as tall as you. She was goodlookin', too, but not as good as this one. Her hair was cut short like this, but was maybe even lighter blonde."

**T**he sick-sweet smell of marijuana permeated the apartment, mixed with the pungent odor of stale perspiration. The middle-aged man in shorts and undershirt obviously provided the raw ingredients for both odors.

"Yeah, I sat in seat 17B. In fact, I asked special for it when I saw the sweetie that had 17C. I was right behind her in the check-in line. Soon's I heard her number I asked for the one next to it. But some dude came and sat in her seat. Never did see the honey again."

"What did this woman look like?" Martin asked.

"Like man, she was blonde and had legs that ran all the way to her ass. Tall as your buddy here, almost," the bearded, scraggly-haired Romeo said, pointing at Kevin. "Was wearin' slacks and one a them loose blouses that don't show for sure what tits they got."

"The 'dude' that sat in 17C, did he look like this picture?" Kevin asked, holding out a picture of Sodlowski.

"Naw, man, din'cha listen? This guy's white. One sat next to me was a *dude*!"

"Did the blonde look anything like this?" Sarnik said, showing a Polaroid shot of Glenda Waiteclif.

"Nope. This un's prettier. Watcha lookin' for the split tail for? She a hooker or somethin'?"

The two detectives closed their notebooks and left the apartment. "So now we know *some-one* other than Sodlowski used the six o'clock ticket," Martin said as they walked toward the car.

"Right. And if bozo back there is right about how tall that someone is, I guess it leaves Glenda baby out," Kevin said. "What about one of the other girlfriends as an accomplice?"

"Must be. Neat trick, though, for her, whoever she is, to not sit in her assigned seat. Makes it damn rough to get a make on her. You up to tracing all four hundred twenty-four passengers to find out who sat next to a goodlooking blonde?"

"No way, buddy." Sarnik flipped a dust mote from his sharply creased trousers. "Where do we go from here?"

"Time to talk to the other two gals, I guess. Also, how about you getting back with Fodorinic and see if you can dig out any more names in case neither of these pans out. I want that

accomplice. It's pretty obvious that Sodlowski faked a trip to L.A. to give himself an alibi for killing his wife, but who helped him? Or how many helped him? When does Miss Brendon get back from the West Coast?"

"Fodorinic didn't know for sure. I'll have to check with her boss."

"Okay, you do that," Martin said. "You take the car, and I'll grab a cab over to talk to Mary Johannson."

**D**ave looked around the richly appointed apartment as he watched the black-uniformed maid disappear through a doorway leading off the living room. Evidently Sodlowski knew people who lived far above the means evident in his own tract home. He rose when the tall, stylishly dressed woman walked into the room. He estimated her age between forty-five and fifty. Her short blonde hair formed a golden frame for a face which must have been beautiful when she was younger, and was still attractive in the maturity of late middle age.

"Miss Johannson, I'm Detective David Martin from Reston."

"That's Mrs. Johannson," she said, extending a well-manicured hand. "What can I do for you?"

"To start with, Mrs. Johann-

son, I'm on the Reston police force and have no jurisdiction here in the District of Columbia. If you desire, I can work formally through the District police, but I would rather ask you a few questions about one of our cases off the record rather than make a big deal out of it."

"Which case is this?" she asked, sitting down on the sofa and indicating a chair for him.

"It's the death of John Sodlowski last Sunday night," Martin said, noting the shocked reaction and look of near panic which covered the woman's face at his words. "I understand that you knew the deceased."

"That's been over," she whispered. "It ended two weeks ago."

"When was the last time you saw him?"

"I told you!" she blurted, breaking into tears. "He told me it was over—that he had found someone else!"

Martin looked away from the woman, feeling faintly betrayed that the cool, self-confident woman he had first met had changed to the beaten, broken person sobbing on the sofa.

"So you know who this other person was?"

"No," she answered, her voice subdued, but regaining control. "His secretary and he had had an affair before he met me . . . maybe he went back to her. I really don't know what he saw in her. She had all of the

social graces of a pig in a sty. Nothing to match his sophistication."

"Where were you last weekend?" Martin asked.

"My husband and I were in Chincoteague on the eastern shore. We own a small beach house there."

Making a note to check the alibi, Martin rose from his chair and started for the door.

"Thank you, Mrs. Johansson. I can't think of anything else right now. I'll be leaving."

"Detective, does this, ah, this investigation have to be public?" she asked.

Martin felt a sense of sympathy in response to the imploring expression in her eyes. "As long as someone in Chincoteague remembers seeing you there this weekend, I see no reason at all to bring up your relationship to Sodlowski."

**L**ieutenant Derrison scowled from behind the inevitable screen of cigar smoke. "So this guy's been screwin' some society gal as well as the working class girls. Did you check out her alibi?"

Dave nodded. "Yes, sir. She has about a hundred witnesses at a party they threw last Sunday afternoon. I think Mrs. Johansson is free and clear as far as being an accomplice in the direct attempt. We're holding judgment, though, on her over-

all involvement, at least until we can get hold of the Brendon woman."

"I thought you said Johannson had an alibi?"

"She does, at least as far as playing a part at the airport. But Sodlowski didn't have any money. He used a credit card to pay for the .32 automatic, but he paid cash for the airline ticket. Even with the super-saver fare, it came to over two hundred dollars, and on his budget he just didn't have that kind of cash available," Martin said. "He bought that super-saver three weeks in advance, and would have still been involved with Johannson at that time."

"Did you check to see he didn't take it out of savings or something?" Derrison quizzed.

Sarnik answered. "I checked that out. The Sodlowskis' savings consisted of about three thousand dollars in savings bonds, and none of those were cashed recently. I suppose he could have saved the money up a little at a time, but it just doesn't sound like the type of self-control this guy normally had. I agree with Dave that one of his girlfriends probably financed the adventure."

"When's the Brendon woman due back in town?"

"Tomorrow afternoon," Kevin said. "She's been in Los Angeles since Sunday."

"You guys are starting to sound like detectives again," Derrison said. "Did she take the six o'clock flight out of Dulles?"

Sarnik looked at his notebook. "No. She flew American out. The flight leaves at seven, but gets into Los Angeles about fifteen minutes after Flight 381 is due. American said she checked in, but couldn't confirm she was on the plane when it left."

"No matter which flight she took, she could still have been the one to pick up his baggage," Martin continued. "I really think we'll get a lot of information about this thing when she gets back."

Tall, well dressed, and with a figure that did full justice to the tailored business suit she wore, Rhonda Brendon was the television prototype of the career girl. The cubicle that served as her office was a typical contractor's office for the individuals who did the work at low wages while management grew rich from government contracts. Sitting in front of her microcomputer terminal, she was intently studying the graphics when the two detectives entered.

"Miss Rhonda Brendon?" Kevin asked.

"Could you wait just a minute, I've almost got this thing

and I hate to leave it right now."

"Sure, go ahead," Martin answered as he took the only other seat in the room. He used the time to study the room, noting her brown bag lunch behind the computer screen, her cloth coat hanging on a hook, her framed diploma from Purdue University hanging on the wall. He also noted the lack of personal pictures on the desk. No picture of Sodlowski, no parents, no kids. Her desktop was as impersonal as the rest of the sterile room.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, gentlemen," she said when she turned from the computer. "What can I do for you?"

Sarnik showed his badge. "We're investigating the death of Mr. John Sodlowski last Sunday and would like you to answer a few questions if you would."

Martin noted the tensing of her face and body as she answered.

"I'll do what I can. John's company works with mine on a classified space project for the navy, and we've been co-workers for about five months."

"Miss Brendon, we know the two of you were having an affair, and we'd like to talk more about your personal rather than your professional relationship," Martin broke in.

His tactic had the desired

shock effect. The veneer of professionalism broke away as she changed to a young woman who had lost something precious.

"John and I were in love," she cried. "He was going to divorce that terrible woman he's married to. Now she's killed him!"

"Were you and Sodlowski going to the same meetings in Los Angeles?" Kevin's tone was conciliatory.

"Yes. We were to have a wonderful week in California without having to sneak around from his snooping wife. But he didn't show up at the airport. I waited for him at the check-in counter and then went to the departure gate, but he wasn't there."

"How well do you know Mrs. Sodlowski?" Sarnik asked.

"I've never met her, but John has told me enough about her that I knew she could kill him. I don't know how he has put up with her all these years. I know he would have divorced her long ago if it weren't for his son."

Martin continued his role as the bad guy. "In other words, you fell for his line about the 'poor misunderstood hubby,'" he said sarcastically. "Are you aware that you're about third in line for swallowing all that crap?"

"That's not true!" she snarled. "He may have had others before

me, but for the last five months it has been just he and I."

"Yeah, and at least two others that we've talked to in the last week."

Sarnik stepped in. "That's not important now. Were you and Sodlowski going to stay at the same hotel in Los Angeles?"

"No. He was afraid his wife would find out and take it out on his son, so we always got rooms at different hotels."

"So when you picked up his luggage at the airport you took it to your hotel?" Martin asked.

"What luggage?" she asked, a look of confusion on her face.

"The luggage Sodlowski checked when he got to the airport," Martin said. "We know he checked his suitcase and that someone picked it up in Los Angeles."

"But he *never* carried a suitcase. He always carried a hang bag and a handbag so he could carry it on the airplane with him. He had a real hangup about having to wait for luggage at the other end."

Martin snorted derisively as he stood up. "Lady, don't plan to be out of town for the next week or so until we get to the bottom of this. We'll want to talk to you again."

**“W**hat do you think?" Sarnik asked as he started the car

and pulled away from the curb.

"God, I don't know," Dave replied. "How the hell could a nice, smart girl like her get involved with a cocksman like Sodlowski? If it wasn't her that picked up the luggage at the other end, who did?"

"I'm curious about her statement that Sodlowski never carried a suitcase," Kevin added. "She's obviously traveled with him a good deal."

"Not so. Remember she said they stayed at separate hotels. I'll bet Sodlowski always insisted on separate planes, too. Could even be so he could take multiple girlfriends on the same trip."

"What now?"

Martin pulled an envelope from his jacket pocket. "I managed to get a photo of Mrs. Johansson from the newspaper society people, and one of Brendon from the security clearance shop. Let's go show them to the travel agent and see if he can identify either of them."

"Sounds good to me," Kevin said as he turned toward the beltway. "You can buy me lunch at the Crystal Underground while we're there. Haven't seen the parade of secretaries in a long time."

"This one could be her. Sure looks a lot like her if it's not," the travel agent said, holding up the picture of Rhonda Brendon. "This other gal is too old."



"You can't positively identify her?" Kevin asked.

"I'm pretty sure it was her, but she was wearing a sort of scarf thing around her neck which covered up part of her mouth and chin. Maybe if I saw her for real with a scarf I could be sure."

"I think we can arrange that," Martin said.

Again in the car, Martin turned to Sarnik and said, "Looks like we're finally getting somewhere. If the old guy can identify her as the one that picked up the ticket, we should be a long way towards making a case."

"Yeah, but I think we're going to have to read her her rights and make it a little more formal. She ain't as dumb as Glenda Waiteclif. I don't think we're going to get away with being as informal as we were with her."

"You're probably right. I want to go over to see Mrs. Sodlowski again. It bothers me that we haven't been able to come up with the missing luggage. Maybe Sodlowski was able to get it back from the skycap, and Mrs. Sodlowski might be able to remember someplace he might have left it."

"Hi, detective. Let me get the door open and you come on in," Pam

said as she undid the door chain. "This is my little boy, Chrissy. He's been all excited about meeting a real live policeman."

The "excited" four-year-old peeked around his mother's slacks at the huge detective. Kneeling, Martin talked to the boy.

"You going to be a policeman when you grow up?"

Chrissy shifted to his mother's other leg, "Yes, sir."

"You're sure a polite boy. Do you want to help me look for clues?"

Chrissy came out from behind his mother. "Sure. Can I, Mommy?"

"Go right ahead," Pam said, laughing. "But don't get in the men's way."

"Y-a-a-a-y," Chrissy whooped as he started for the living room.

Pam turned to the detectives. "I hope you know what you've let yourselves in for. What can I do to help?"

"We just want to look at the bedroom again. Quite frankly, we have a motive, a method, and a weapon for your husband to try to kill you. And if you hadn't woken up, he probably would have killed you and would have had a near-perfect alibi. We also have a couple of prospective accomplices with motives and opportunities to help. But we can't quite tie it together in one neat package."

"Does it make a difference?" Pam asked. "Isn't it enough to know what he was going to do without having to know everything about it?"

Martin laughed. "Not if we hope to get our report past the boss. He's a real stickler for all of these things to come out nice and neat. But, more important, there's at least one and possibly more people out there who tried to help your husband who have to be shown they can't get away with attempted murder."

"I suspected John was cheating, but I never dreamed they would try to kill me."

"We've heard that your husband never carried a suitcase, only a hang bag, on his trips," Martin said. "Are you sure he had a suitcase to check?"

Pam appeared to concentrate. "You're right. He normally carried a hang bag, but this time he had to carry enough for a whole week so he took the big Samsonite. His hang bag should still be in this closet over here."

With Chrissy trailing behind, Sarnik walked to the spot where the body had fallen. "Which nightstand drawer was the revolver kept in?"

"The one on the left, here on my side," Pam said.

"Good thing it wasn't in your husband's nightstand. You'd never have had a chance to get

to it," Kevin said as he looked across the kingsize bed. To Martin he said, "Even with the revolver on her side, the drug must have started to wear off and slowed his reactions for her to have time to get the weapon out of the drawer and start firing."

"What drug?" Pam asked.

Sarnik explained the pathology findings. "Did your husband normally use drugs to stay awake?"

"No, he . . ."

"Why was the revolver kept on your side and not on your husband's?" Martin asked suddenly, interrupting her reply. He walked to the nightstand. Her purse, checkbook, credit card case, and car keys were lying on top.

"I . . . I don't know. It just was." Pam looked shaken. "I suppose it was because I'm home so much alone."

"Well, sure lucky for you it was," he said. "Come on, Kevin, let's go down to the station and see if we can sort anything out as to who his accomplices were."

Pam led the way down the hall, Chrissy happily following in their wake. Unlocking the safety chain she opened the door for the two men.

Pam watched from the window as the two men sat in the car. Why weren't they pulling

away from the curb? Must be writing that report while they were sitting there. It looked as if they were talking on the radio or something. She would be glad to see the end of them and have this case closed.

She turned from the window to see why Chrissy was so quiet. She laughed as she remembered his excitement at helping the detectives look for clues. It would be a rough life for the kid without a father. She would have to think about finding someone to provide the male influence for him.

The jar of the doorbell startled her. "Easy, girl," she said to herself. "Don't get jumpy now."

As she undid the chain, she was surprised to see Martin's lined face on the other side of the door. "Did you forget something?" she asked.

"Not really, ma'am, I just had an idea, and I think you can help us out with it. Could you come with us for a little bit?"

"Sure, be glad to if it will help catch whoever helped John with this thing. Let me get Chrissy."

The four of them chatted as the car pulled from the drive and headed downtown. When they stopped in front of a department store, Kevin got out and went in.

"He'll be just a minute," Martin said as he slouched against

the right front door, smiling back at Chrissy. "Needs to pick up some stuff."

Sarnik returned with two sacks. One he gave to Chrissy. "Boy like you needs a toy like this."

Chrissy's eyes danced with excitement as he opened the sack. He took the toy police badge and proudly pinned it to his chest. "Look, Mommy, now I can really look for clues!"

"Don't forget to say thank you, Chrissy." Pam smiled in gratitude at the two men.

Pam's smile faded as they pulled to the curb in front of the travel agency. "What are we doing here?" she asked.

"Want you to meet someone," Martin said.

They walked to the agent sitting at his desk. He looked Pam over appreciatively. "Can I help you?"

"Just wondered if you had seen this woman before," Martin said.

"She looks vaguely familiar, but I can't say from where."

Sarnik pulled a blonde wig from the second sack and pulled it over Pam's auburn hair. She seemed too startled to resist, even as he wrapped a filmy scarf around her neck, covering her chin and mouth.

"Does that make it easier to recall?" Kevin asked.

"Sure! That's Smith's secretary. She's the one that picked up the ticket."

**M**artin pushed back from the typewriter, the completed report in his hand. "She must have planned for over six months on how her husband would commit the perfect crime, and then did all of the things he would have had to do to make it look like he'd tried to do it."

"She sure had it figured out," Sarnik agreed. "It really looked to me as if Sodlowski had tried to kill her, and only bad luck on his part kept him from doing it."

"God, I don't know why I didn't catch on to that door chain bit sooner. She locked that thing all the time," Dave went on. "No way in the world her husband could have gotten in that night without breaking something."

"Just the same, I'm glad she confessed. It would have been tough as hell getting a conviction on the circumstantial evidence we have."

"I don't know. I'm sure the punk who stood behind her at the airline ticket counter could have recognized her, especially with the wig. And eventually we would have found where she got the uppers she fed Sodlowski early in the day to get

him to fall asleep and miss his flight. God, he must have been wired all day!"

"It must have taken a lot of nerve for her to leave him there, hoping he didn't wake up while she went to the airport and checked in," Kevin added. "I almost don't believe the coolness it must have taken to lay him out on the floor and then stand on the chair to shoot the first shot, step down and shoot the second one, and finally, to put the gun right up against his sternum so the slug wouldn't go all the way through him. Sure gave a good simulation of him coming closer to her all the time. And even having the presence of mind to lie on the bed and fire the two rounds to simulate misses. The angle of entry of all five shots was just right to support her story."

"And how about her bit of getting two tickets from the parking lot machine on Saturday by backing up and recrossing the pressure plate. Then using one of them Saturday to get out of the lot, and then the other one on Sunday to make it look like her husband's car had been in the lot for twenty-four hours. Clever, too, the way she got mud on Sodlowski's shoes when she parked the car. She had this planned out pretty well," Martin said. "I as good as believed he had driven his car back from Dulles, parked it un-

der those trees, and walked back from there."

"You know, it all hangs together once you see the whole picture, but what made you suspect her all of a sudden?"

"Seeing her credit card on the nightstand. I remembered on one of my earlier visits out there she made a comment about doing her monthly chore of paying the bills. Her husband bought the .32 automatic on a credit card. She definitely would have noticed a bill for nearly two hundred dollars, so she would have known about the second gun. As tight as their finances were, I'll bet she would have raised holy hell about his

spending that kind of money without telling her. I suddenly realized she must have lied about that, and it made me wonder how much she had lied about other things."

"It would have helped, too, if we'd realized earlier that Chrissy spent the afternoon at his grandma's house while his mom checked in at the airport and did her thing. What's going to happen to Chrissy now, do you suppose?"

"His grandmother has him, at least for the time being," Martin replied. "Said something about taking him on a picnic today. Come on, I'll buy you a beer."

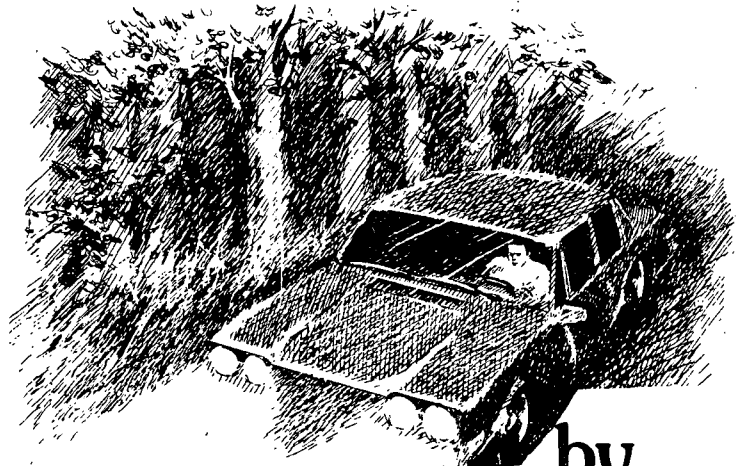
---

## **SOLUTION TO THE JUNE "UNSOLVED":**

---

The fewest possible moves for getting the prisoners into their dungeons in the required numerical order are twenty-six. The men move in the following order: 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 6, 5, 3, 1, 2, 6, 5, 3, 1, 2, 4, 8, 7, 1, 2, 4, 8, 7, 4, 5, 6. As there is never more than one vacant dungeon to be moved into, there can be no ambiguity in the notation.

# Nature's Own



by  
**Thomasina  
Weber**



**J**ack Lawson fought his way back out of the woods to his car, tossed the spade and lantern into the trunk and slammed it closed. He had chosen a good spot; there was no one to hear any sound he might make, and there was no one to see what he had done. This place had not been designed for automobile traffic, he thought as he back-and-forthed his car around and headed back to his two room cabin. It had not been designed for a burial ground either, but Nature never refused to reclaim her own.

The next morning Jack went to the village and entered the general store. "Morning, Jack," said Calvin from the dim, stale-smelling interior.

Jack stepped quickly out of reach of the screen door as it slammed shut behind him. A lifelong resident of Willow Junction, Jack had learned that trick early and still believed, as each growing child now believed, that Calvin had installed the extra-snappy spring because he hated kids.

"Good morning, Calvin. Got any cold soda?"

"Always do, don't I?" Calvin was a tall spare man who creaked when he walked. He always wore a hat, rumored to have been handed down from an ancestor who had been an officer in the Union Army. Jack suspected that his shirt had the same origin.

"Heard the latest?" asked Calvin. Since this was Calvin's customary opening, Jack did not stop in his search of the soda cooler for his favorite flavor. The latest could be anything from the Jenkinses' cat's having kittens to Silly Sally, who was always losing her purse.

"Silly Sally's gone."

Jack did not cut short his first swig. The first swallow always tasted the best. "Gone where?" he asked, wiping his lips.

"Nobody knows."

"Small loss."

"That ain't a nice thing to say. She's all Old Tom's got."

"Maybe he'll be better off without her."

"You sound as if she ain't coming back."

"Maybe she isn't. Maybe she ran off with some city fella." He grinned at Calvin but Calvin failed to appreciate the humor.

"You know she never had eyes for nobody but you."

"Don't remind me," groaned Jack.

"She's a goodlooking girl, even if she is soft in the head."

"Well, I don't have to settle for any Silly Sally type," said Jack, taking another drink and remembering with satisfaction how the girls would turn to look at him whenever he went to the city.

"She went for a walk after supper last night and never came back," said Calvin.

"Maybe she hitched a ride to the city."

"She never did that before."

"There's a first time for everything." He put the empty bottle in the rack. "If you'll bag up a carton of milk and a couple of pork chops, I'll be getting on home." Willow Junction was going to be a lot pleasanter without Silly Sally, Jack thought as he left the store.

He was surprised to see Old Tom's car parked in his driveway when he reached home. Tom never took his car out except on Thursdays when he drove to the city for supplies. Old Tom's Day, it was called, for he always took along either his neighbors' grocery lists or the neighbors themselves.

Old Tom's car was empty. People never locked their doors in Willow Junction, so Jack stepped into his kitchen. "Tom?"

"I already been inside," said Tom from somewhere behind him.



Jack turned to see the old man coming toward him from the chicken coops.

"Did you find anything?" asked Jack, annoyed at the inquisitiveness of the old man.

"I found somethin'." He brought one hand out from behind his back. He was holding Sally's purse. "It's my girl's," he said.

"I found it on the road last night," said Jack. "I was going to take it over to her today."

"It rained last night."

"So?"

"Purse ain't wet."

"It was under a bush at the side of the road."

"How'd you see it then, in the dark?"

"My headlights hit the shiny handle when I swerved to avoid a rabbit." He could see Old Tom did not believe him. "Stranger things have happened," he added.

"Did you see Sally last night?"

"Me? Why should I see her?"

"She said you were going to take her for a ride."

"Sally's always saying things like that. I went to the city last night."

"What for?"

"It's none of your business."

Tom stepped closer to Jack and as they stood eye to eye Jack felt a pang of fear rip through him. Tom might be an old man, but he was a powerful one.

"My Sally said she was going out with you and that makes it my business."

"I had a date with a waitress."

"Which one?"

"I can't tell you that. You want her to lose her job? They're not supposed to date the customers."

"I want to know her name!" Tom grabbed the front of Jack's shirt.

"I—I don't know. She—uh—had to leave town this morning. Her mother's sick."

Tom released Jack with a push. "You always were a rotten kid," he said. "I don't blame your parents for taking off as soon as you were old enough to be on your own. I don't know how they put up with you that long." He started toward the driveway, but it was Jack's car he was heading for.

"What are you doing?" asked Jack as Tom grasped the handle of the trunk. "Hey, Tom, there's nothing in there!"

But Tom already had it open, had the spade in his hand, was bringing it closer so his aging eyes could see it clearly.

"Been digging, Jack?" Tom was very pale.

"Yeah."

"Burying something?"

"Funny you should ask." He tried to clear the squeak out of his voice. "Last night I ran over the Jenkinses' molly cat. I knew how upset the old lady would be if she knew, so I took it into the woods and buried it. I figured she'd rather think it had run away."

"You never were one to think about anybody else's feelings," said Tom. "Where'd you bury her?"

"Out in the woods. You know how the dogs are always digging things up around here. I didn't want Mrs. Jenkins to find the body—or part of it—someday."

"Sure," said Tom, putting the spade back in the trunk. "Get in the car," he said.

"Why?"

"We're going to visit the grave."

"Aw, Tom, have a heart! I don't want to go back there." Tom moved forward and Jack hastily got behind the wheel. "I don't know if I can find it again," he said.

"You better find it or I'll be digging a new grave in the woods."

"All because of a *cat*?"

Tom did not answer and Jack kept his eyes on the road. Old Tom was a local legend and because he was so quiet, many stories were told about his secret temper. When Jack was a boy, he and his friends grew up on tales of strangers being held prisoner and tortured at Tom's place. One time after a long and solid week of rain, the boys thought they saw a human arm floating in Old Tom's flooded cellar. They checked on it regularly for three days and finally, unable to stand it any longer, they chose Jack to crawl through the window to investigate. He found it to be a stick of firewood that had been laboriously peeled, undoubtedly by Silly Sally, who spent a lot of time doing dumb things like that. Then Old Tom had come clumping down the cellar stairs and Jack, panic-stricken, had screamed to be pulled through the window. Tom reached him before he was all the way out and delivered a stinging whack to his exposed rear end, catapulting him through the rest of the way.

Jack dragged his mind back to the present, wondering why he should pick a time like this to remember such a thing. He had little need to scare himself to death.

"She's a good girl," said Old Tom. "I feel sorry for anybody who's hurt her."

"Tom, I told you there's only an old molly cat in that grave."

"We'll see."

Jack watched for the landmarks that would show him where to turn off. When he swung into the woods, Tom glared at him.

"You trying to be funny, Jack? There's no road here."

"It's in here a ways."

"Why would you pick such a lonely place to bury a cat?"

"I told you already. So the dogs wouldn't dig it up."

Tom said nothing. Jack thought he might be saving his strength, an idea that gave him no comfort whatever. Jack could feel his own muscles turning to water. That was the one trouble with him, maybe even the real reason he had never ventured away from Willow Junction—his backbone did not measure up to his muscles.

Jack stopped the car. He thought of telling Tom to go first and then running him down with the car, but along with the thought came the realization that it would never work.

"All right, let's go," said Tom. "You get out first."

Together they walked to the rear of the car and Tom told Jack to bring the spade and lead the way. "Gee, Tom, I don't think I'll be able to find it."

"If you don't find it, you're dead."

Jack knew exactly where it was and, after what he hoped was a convincing search, announced its discovery.

"All right, start digging."

"Me?" exclaimed Jack.

"You."

"Oh, Tom, don't make me dig her up! I can't stand dead cats."

"Dig." Tom's eyes were blue granite chips.

Jack began to dig. With every shovelful he was acutely aware of Tom's presence at his side, hard eyes on the spade. He wondered if Tom were sufficiently engrossed to let Jack swing at him, but decided Tom had lived too long with nature. He might seem to be absorbed in what was going on, but he had a sixth sense, an animal instinct that stood guard.

Jack took small shovelfuls, although he wanted to get it over with. Tom was breathing heavily and Jack could see his fists clenching and unclenching.

"I—I've reached it."

"You only buried her two feet deep?" he demanded.

Jack straightened and looked into Tom's eyes. "She was only a small cat."

Sally had brought it on herself, ruining his whole night like that. When he had promised to take her for a ride, he had only been joking. Everybody put Sally on just for the fun of it because Sally believed everything she was told. But he had had other plans for the evening. After a month of trying he had finally got the waitress lined up. As he left for his date, his headlights picked up the molly and, high with the thought of the pleasurable night ahead, he had headed right for the cat. He might never have hit it, for cats are quick, but out of the shadows came Silly Sally's voice calling the cat and it hesitated, fatally.

And then Sally was screaming and he was out of the car trying to shut her up. She had picked up the body and there was blood on the front of her dress and she looked crazier than ever. Still screaming, she started toward him with the gruesome thing in her arms and he socked her. She went straight back like a felled tree. He knew he could not leave her there, for she would tell her father some wild story and he would believe her and that would be the end of Jack Lawson. So he bent to pick her up. He was not prepared for the blood. Her head must have hit a boulder. She might even be dead, but he could not stop to find out.

She was a small woman and he half-carried, half-dragged her to the trunk of his car so as not to soil his clothes. He threw the cat in on top of her and picked her purse up out of the road where she had dropped it when she went to the aid of the cat. As he drove away, it began to rain. *Thank you, Nature*, he said, *for cleaning that bloody rock*. If only he hadn't forgotten her purse when he buried her. This morning, in the daylight, he had found it in the trunk when he was checking for stains. He took it into his cabin, planning to burn it in the evening with his daily trash. And then Tom had to come along and find it.

Leaning on the spade, Jack faced Tom across the grave. Tom's murderous eyes forced his own to drop after an agonizing few seconds and Jack pushed the spade deep, coming up with the dirt-disguised form of a cat.

"See, Tom? The Jenkinses' molly cat." He dropped it back into the hole and quickly covered it.

Old Tom stood there staring down as Jack leveled off the dirt and scraped the pine needles back over it. He was almost sorry for

the old man. "I guess we can go now," said Jack.

"Sally is a good girl," said Tom tonelessly, not moving.

"Yeah, she was okay." He felt almost jubilant as he realized the danger was past, that Tom was not going to unleash his temper after all. He knew if he whined enough Tom would insist he dig, just to be mean, and it had worked. If Tom had dug into the grave himself he would have noticed the dirt was soft and loose below the cat's body and he would have kept digging and he would have found her down there.

"What did you say?" Tom's voice brought him back to the present.

"When?"

"Just now, when I said Sally's a good girl. Didn't you say, 'She was okay?'"

"Yeah. I had nothing against Sally."

"She *was* okay, you said. You *had* nothing against her." Tom's face was an inch from his own. "My Sally is dead and you killed her."

"Hey, wait a minute, Tom—"

But Tom wasn't listening.

The next day was Old Tom's Day, but since it was raining, none of the neighbors felt like riding to the city, so Tom collected their lists and set out in his ancient car. His first stop before the ten mile trip was the general store.

"Morning, Tom," said Calvin.

"Morning, Calvin."

"Heard the latest?"

"Don't believe so."

"Jack Lawson's gone."

"That a fact?"

"Yup. I stopped by his place this morning on my way in. No sign of him or his car."

"Probably went away for a day or two."

"I'm not so sure about that, Tom." Calvin leaned on the counter confidentially. "I got a different idea."

"That so?"

"First Sally, then Jack. Looks to me like they mighta eloped, leavin' separate so's nobody'd know they was together. Don't it look like that to you, Tom?"

"Looks like," said Tom, rubbing the aching muscle in his arm. They were together, all right.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

# Jeeves and the Love That Purifies

by P. G. Wodehouse



Illustration by Hank Blaustein

129

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

**T**here is a ghastly moment in the year, generally about the beginning of August, when Jeeves insists on taking a holiday, the slacker, and legs it off to some seaside resort for a couple of weeks, leaving me stranded. This moment had now arrived, and we were discussing what was to be done with the young master.

"I had gathered the impression, sir," said Jeeves, "that you were proposing to accept Mr. Sipperley's invitation to join him at his Hampshire residence."

I laughed. One of those bitter, rasping ones.

"Correct, Jeeves. I was. But mercifully I was enabled to discover young Sippy's foul plot in time. Do you know what?"

"No, sir."

"My spies informed me that Sippy's fiancée, Miss Moon, was to be there. Also his fiancée's small brother, Master Moon. You see the hideous treachery lurking behind the invitation? You see the man's loathsome design? Obviously my job was to be the task of keeping Mrs. Moon and little Sebastian Moon interested and amused while Sippy and his blighted girl went off for the day, roaming the pleasant woodlands and talking of this and that. I doubt if anyone has ever had a narrower escape. You remember little Sebastian?"

"Yes, sir."

"His goggle eyes? His golden curls?"

"Yes, sir."

"I don't know why it is, but I've never been able to bear with fortitude anything in the shape of a kid with golden curls. Confronted with one, I feel the urge to step on him or drop things on him from a height."

"Many strong natures are affected in the same way, sir."

"So no *chez* Sippy for me. Was that the front-door bell ringing?"

"Yes, sir."

"Somebody stands without."

"Yes, sir."

"Better go and see who it is."

"Yes, sir."

He oozed off, to return a moment later bearing a telegram. I opened it, and a soft smile played about the lips.

"Amazing how often things happen as if on a cue, Jeeves. This is from my Aunt Dahlia, inviting me down to her place in Worcestershire."



"Most satisfactory, sir."

"Yes. How I came to overlook her when searching for a haven, I can't think. The ideal home from home. Picturesque surroundings. Company's own water, and the best cook in England. You have not forgotten Anatole?"

"No, sir."

"And above all, Jeeves, at Aunt Dahlia's there should be an almost total shortage of blasted kids. True, there is her son Bonzo, who, I take it, will be home for the holidays, but I don't mind Bonzo. Buzz off and send a wire, accepting."

"Yes, sir."

"And then shove a few necessities together, including golf clubs and tennis racquet."

"Very good, sir. I am glad that matters have been so happily adjusted."

I think I have mentioned before that my Aunt Dahlia stands alone in the grim regiment of my aunts as a real good sort and a chirpy sportsman. She is the one, if you remember, who married old Tom Travers and, with the assistance of Jeeves, lured Mrs. Bingo Little's French cook, Anatole, away from Mrs. B.L. and into her own employment. To visit her is always a pleasure. She generally has some cheery birds staying with her, and there is none of that rot about getting up for breakfast which one is sadly apt to find at country houses.

It was, accordingly, with unalloyed lightness of heart that I edged the two-seater into the garage at Brinkley Court, Worc., and strolled around to the house by way of the shrubbery and the tennis lawn, to report arrival. I had just got across the lawn when a head poked itself out of the smoking room window and beamed at me in an amiable sort of way.

"Ah, Mr. Wooster," it said. "Ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho!" I replied, not to be outdone in the courtesies.

It had taken me a couple of seconds to place this head. I now perceived that it belonged to a rather motheaten septuagenarian of the name of Anstruther, an old friend of Aunt Dahlia's late father. I had met him at her house in London once or twice. An agreeable cove but somewhat given to nervous breakdowns.

"Just arrived?" he asked, beaming as before.

"This minute," I said, also beaming.

"I fancy you will find our good hostess in the drawing room."

"Right," I said, and after a bit more beaming to and fro I pushed on.

Aunt Dahlia was in the drawing room, and welcomed me with gratifying enthusiasm. She beamed, too. It was one of those big days for beamers.

"Hullo, ugly," she said. "So here you are. Thank heaven you were able to come."

It was the right tone, and one I should be glad to hear in others of the family circle, notably my Aunt Agatha.

"Always a pleasure to enjoy your hosp., Aunt Dahlia," I said cordially. "I anticipate a delightful and restful visit. I see you've got Mr. Anstruther staying here. Anybody else?"

"Do you know Lord Snettisham?"

"I've met him, racing."

"He's here, and Lady Snettisham."

"And Bonzo, of course?"

"Yes. And Thomas."

"Uncle Thomas?"

"No, he's in Scotland. Your cousin Thomas."

"You don't mean Aunt Agatha's loathly son?"

"Of course I do. How many cousin Thomases do you think you've got, fathead? Agatha has gone to Homburg and planted the child on me."

I was visibly agitated.

"But, Aunt Dahlia! Do you realize what you've taken on? Have you an inkling of the sort of scourge you've introduced into your home? In the society of young Thos, strong men quail. He is England's premier fiend in human shape. There is no devilry beyond his scope."

"That's what I have always gathered from the form book," agreed the relative. "But just now, curse him, he's behaving like something out of a Sunday school story. You see, poor old Mr. Anstruther is very frail these days, and when he was found in a house containing two boys he acted promptly. He offered a prize of five pounds to whichever behaved best during his stay. The consequence is that, ever since, Thomas has had large white wings sprouting out of his shoulders." A shadow seemed to pass across her face. She appeared embittered. "Mercenary little brute!" she said. "I never saw such a sickeningly well-behaved kid in my life. It's enough to make one despair of human nature."

I couldn't follow her.

"But isn't that all to the good?"

"No, it's not."

"I can't see why. Surely a smug, oily Thos about the house is better than a Thos raging hither and thither and being a menace to society? Stands to reason."

"It doesn't stand to anything of the kind. You see, Bertie, this Good Conduct prize has made matters a bit complex. There are wheels within wheels. The thing stirred Jane Snettisham's sporting blood to such an extent that she insisted on having a bet on the result."

A great light shone upon me. I got what she was driving at.

"Ah!" I said. "Now I follow. Now I see. Now I comprehend. She's betting on Thos, is she?"

"Yes. And naturally, knowing him, I thought the thing was in the bag."

"Of course."

"I couldn't see myself losing. Heaven knows I have no illusions about my darling Bonzo. Bonzo is, and has been from the cradle, a pest. But to back him to win a Good Conduct contest with Thomas seemed to me simply money for jam."

"Absolutely."

"When it comes to devilry, Bonzo is just a good, ordinary selling-plater. Whereas Thomas is a classic yearling."

"Exactly. I don't see that you have any cause to worry, Aunt Dahlia. Thos can't last. He's bound to crack."

"Yes. But before that the mischief may be done."

"Mischief?"

"Yes. There is dirty work afoot, Bertie," said Aunt Dahlia gravely. "When I booked this bet, I reckoned without the hideous blackness of the Snettishams' souls. Only yesterday it came to my knowledge that Jack Snettisham had been urging Bonzo to climb on the roof and boo down Mr. Anstruther's chimney."

"No!"

"Yes. Mr. Anstruther is very frail, poor old fellow, and it would have frightened him into a fit. On coming out of which, his first action would have been to disqualify Bonzo and declare Thomas the winner by default."

"But Bonzo did not boo?"

"No," said Aunt Dahlia, and a mother's pride rang in her voice. "He firmly refused to boo. Mercifully, he is in love at the moment, and it has quite altered his nature. He scorned the tempter."

"In love? Who with?"

"Lilian Gish. We had an old film of hers at the Bijou Dream in the village a week ago, and Bonzo saw her for the first time. He came out with a pale, set face, and ever since has been trying to lead a finer, better life. So the peril was averted."

"That's good."

"Yes. But now it's my turn. You don't suppose I am going to take a thing like that lying down, do you? Treat me right, and I am fairness itself: but try any of this nobbling of starters, and I can play that game, too. If this Good Conduct contest is to be run on rough lines, I can do my bit as well as anyone. Far too much hangs on the issue for me to handicap myself by remembering the lessons I learned at my mother's knee."

"Lot of money involved?"

"Much more than mere money. I've betted Anatole against Jane Snettisham's kitchen maid."

"Great Scott! Uncle Thomas will have something to say if he comes back and finds Anatole gone."

"And won't he say it!"

"Pretty long odds you gave her, didn't you? I mean, Anatole is famed far and wide as a hash-slinger without peer."

"Well, Jane Snettisham's kitchen maid is not to be sneezed at. She is very hot stuff, they tell me, and good kitchen maids nowadays are about as rare as original Holbeins. Besides, I had to give her a shade the best of the odds. She stood out for it. Well, anyway, to get back to what I was saying, if the opposition are going to place temptations in Bonzo's path, they shall jolly well be placed in Thomas's path, too, and plenty of them. So ring for Jeeves and let him get his brain working."

"But I haven't brought Jeeves."

"You haven't brought Jeeves?"

"No. He always takes his holiday at this time of year. He's down at Bognor for the shrimping."

Aunt Dahlia registered deep concern.

"Then send for him at once! What earthly use do you suppose you are without Jeeves, you poor ditherer?"

I drew myself up a trifle—in fact, to my full height. Nobody has a greater respect for Jeeves than I have, but the Wooster pride was stung.

"Jeeves isn't the only one with brains," I said coldly. "Leave this thing to me, Aunt Dahlia. By dinnertime tonight I shall hope to

have a fully matured scheme to submit for your approval. If I can't thoroughly encompass this Thos, I'll eat my hat."

"About all you'll get to eat if Anatole leaves," said Aunt Dahlia in a pessimistic manner which I did not like to see.

I was brooding pretty tensely as I left the presence. I have always had a suspicion that Aunt Dahlia, while invariably matey and bonhomous and seeming to take pleasure in my society, has a lower opinion of my intelligence than I quite like. Too often it is her practice to address me as "fathead," and if I put forward any little thought or idea or fancy in her hearing it is apt to be greeted with the affectionate but jarring guffaw. In our recent interview she had hinted quite plainly that she considered me negligible in a crisis which, like the present one, called for initiative and resource. It was my intention to show her how greatly she had underestimated me.

To let you see the sort of fellow I really am, I got a ripe, excellent idea before I had gone halfway down the corridor. I examined it for the space of one and a half cigarettes, and could see no flaw in it, provided—I say, provided old Mr. Anstruther's notion of what constituted bad conduct squared with mine.

The great thing on these occasions, as Jeeves will tell you, is to get a toe-hold on the psychology of the individual. Study the individual, and you will bring home the bacon. Now, I had been studying young Thos for years, and I knew his psychology from caviar to nuts. He is one of those kids who never let the sun go down on their wrath, if you know what I mean. I mean to say, do something to annoy or offend or upset this juvenile thug, and he will proceed at the earliest possible opp. to wreak a hideous vengeance upon you. Only the previous summer, for instance, it having been drawn to his attention that the latter had reported him for smoking, he had marooned a cabinet minister on an island in the lake, at Aunt Agatha's place in Hertfordshire—in the rain, mark you, and with no company but that of the nastiest-minded swans I have ever encountered. Well, I mean!

So now it seemed to me that a few well-chosen taunts, or jibes, directed at his more sensitive points, must infallibly induce in this Thos a frame of mind which would lead to his working some sensational violence upon me. And, if you wonder that I was willing to sacrifice myself to this frightful extent in order to do Aunt Dahlia a bit of good, I can only say that we Woosters are like that.

The one point that seemed to me to want a spot of clearing up was this: viz., would old Mr. Anstruther consider an outrage perpetrated on the person of Bertram Wooster a crime sufficiently black to cause him to rule Thos out of the race? Or would he just give a senile chuckle and mumble something about boys being boys? Because, if the latter, the thing was off. I decided to have a word with the old boy and make sure.

He was still in the smoking room, looking very frail over the morning *Times*. I got to the point at once.

"Oh, Mr. Anstruther," I said. "What ho!"

"I don't like the way the American market is shaping," he said. "I don't like this strong bear movement."

"No?" I said. "Well, be that as it may, about this Good Conduct prize of yours?"

"Ah, you have heard of that, eh?"

"I don't quite understand how you are doing the judging."

"No? It is very simple. I have a system of daily marks. At the beginning of each day I accord the two lads twenty marks apiece. These are subject to withdrawal either in small or large quantities according to the magnitude of the offense. To take a simple example, shouting outside my bedroom in the early morning would involve a loss of three marks—whistling, two. The penalty for a more serious lapse would be correspondingly greater. Before retiring to rest at night I record the day's marks in my little book. Simple, but, I think, ingenious, Mr. Wooster?"

"Absolutely."

"So far the result has been extremely gratifying. Neither of the little fellows has lost a single mark, and my nervous system is acquiring a tone which, when I learned that two lads of immature years would be staying in the house during my visit, I confess I had not dared to anticipate."

"I see," I said. "Great work. And how do you react to what I might call general moral turpitude?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Well, I mean when the thing doesn't affect you personally. Suppose one of them did something to me, for instance? Set a booby-trap or something? Or, shall we say, put a toad or so in my bed?"

He seemed shocked at the very idea.

"I would certainly in such circumstances deprive the culprit of a full ten marks."

"Only ten?"

"Fifteen, then."

"Twenty is a nice, round number."

"Well, possibly even twenty. I have a peculiar horror of practical joking."

"Me, too."

"You will not fail to advise me, Mr. Wooster, should such an outrage occur?"

"You shall have the news before anyone," I assured him.

And so out into the garden, ranging to and fro in quest of young Thos. I knew where I was now. Bertram's feet were on solid ground.

I hadn't been hunting long before I found him in the summer-house, reading an improving book.

"Hullo," he said, smiling a saintlike smile.

This scourge of humanity was a chunky kid whom a too indulgent public had allowed to infest the country for a matter of fourteen years. His nose was snub, his eyes green, his general aspect that of one studying to be a gangster. I had never liked his looks much, and with a saintlike smile added to them they became ghastly to a degree.

I ran over in my mind a few assorted taunts.

"Well, young Thos," I said. "So there you are. You're getting as fat as a pig."

It seemed as good an opening as any other. Experience had taught me that if there was a subject on which he was unlikely to accept persiflage in a spirit of amused geniality it was this matter of his bulging tum. On the last occasion when I made a remark of this nature, he had replied to me, child though he was, in terms which I would have been proud to have in my own vocabulary. But now, though a sort of wistful gleam did flit for a moment into his eyes, he merely smiled in a more saintlike manner than ever.

"Yes, I think I have been putting on a little weight," he said gently. "I must try and exercise a lot while here. Won't you sit down, Bertie?" he asked, rising. "You must be tired after your journey. I'll get you a cushion. Have you cigarettes? And matches? I could bring you some from the smoking room. Would you like me to fetch you something to drink?"

It is not too much to say that I felt baffled. In spite of what Aunt Dahlia had told me, I don't think that until this moment I had really believed there could have been anything in the nature of a genuinely sensational change in this young plug-ugly's attitude towards his fellows. But now, hearing him talk as if he were a



combination of Boy Scout and delivery wagon, I felt definitely baffled. However, I stuck at it in the old bulldog way.

"Are you still at that rotten kids' school of yours?" I asked.

He might have been proof against jibes at his *embonpoint*, but it seemed to me incredible that he could have sold himself for gold so completely as to lie down under taunts directed at his school. I was wrong. The money-lust evidently held him in its grip. He merely shook his head.

"I left this term. I'm going to Pevenhurst next term."

"They wear mortarboards there, don't they?"

"Yes."

"With pink tassels?"

"Yes."

"What a priceless ass you'll look!" I said, but without much hope. And I laughed heartily.

"I expect I shall," he said, and laughed still more heartily.

"Mortarboards!"

"Ha, ha!"

"Pink tassels!"

"Ha, ha!"

I gave the thing up.

"Well, teuf-teuf," I said moodily, and withdrew.

A couple of days later I realized that the virus had gone even deeper than I had thought. The kid was irredeemably sordid.

It was old Mr. Anstruther who sprang the bad news.

"Oh, Mr. Wooster," he said, meeting me on the stairs as I came down after a refreshing breakfast. "You were good enough to express an interest in this little prize for Good Conduct which I am offering."

"Oh, ah?"

"I explained to you my system of marking, I believe. Well, this morning I was impelled to vary it somewhat. The circumstances seemed to me to demand it. I happened to encounter our hostess's nephew, the boy Thomas, returning to the house, his aspect somewhat weary, it appeared to me, and travel-stained. I inquired of him where he had been at that early hour—it was not yet breakfast-time—and he replied that he had heard you mention overnight a regret that you had omitted to order the *Sporting Times* to be sent to you before leaving London, and he had actually walked all the way to the railway station, a distance of more than three miles, to procure it for you."

The old boy swam before my eyes. He looked like two old Mr. Anstruthers, both flickering at the edges.

"What!"

"I can understand your emotion, Mr. Wooster. I can appreciate it. It is indeed rarely that one encounters such unselfish kindness in a lad of his age. So genuinely touched was I by the goodness of heart which the episode showed that I have deviated from my original system and awarded the little fellow a bonus of fifteen marks."

"Fifteen!"

"On second thoughts, I shall make it twenty. That, as you yourself suggested, is a nice, round number."

He doddered away, and I bounded off to find Aunt Dahlia.

"Aunt Dahlia," I said, "matters have taken a sinister turn."

"You bet your Sunday spats they have," agreed Aunt Dahlia emphatically. "Do you know what happened just now? That crook Snettisham, who ought to be warned off the turf and hounded out of his clubs, offered Bonzo ten shillings if he would burst a paper bag behind Mr. Anstruther's chair at breakfast. Thank heaven the love of a good woman triumphed again. My sweet Bonzo merely looked at him and walked away in a marked manner. But it just shows you what we are up against."

"We are up against worse than that, Aunt Dahlia," I said. And I told her what had happened.

She was stunned. Aghast, you might call it.

"Thomas did that?"

"Thos in person."

"Walked six miles to get you a paper?"

"Six miles and a bit."

"The young hound! Good heavens, Bertie, do you realize that he may go on doing these Acts of Kindness daily—perhaps twice a day? Is there no way of stopping him?"

"None that I can think of. No, Aunt Dahlia, I must confess it. I am baffled. There is only one thing to do. We must send for Jeeves."

"And about time," said the relative churlishly. "He ought to have been here from the start. Wire him this morning."

There is good stuff in Jeeves. His heart is in the right place. The acid test does not find him wanting. Many men in his position, summoned back by telegram in the middle of their annual vacation, might have cut up rough a bit. But not Jeeves. On the following

afternoon in he blew, looking bronzed and fit, and I gave him the scenario without delay.

"So there you have it, Jeeves," I said, having sketched out the facts. "The problem is one that will exercise your intelligence to the utmost. Rest now, and tonight, after a light repast, withdraw to some solitary place and get down to it. Is there any particularly stimulating food or beverage you would like for dinner? Anything you feel would give the old brain just that extra fillip? If so, name it."

"Thank you very much, sir, but I have already hit upon a plan which should, I fancy, prove effective."

I gazed at the man with some awe.

"Already?"

"Yes, sir."

"Not *already*?"

"Yes, sir."

"Something to do with the psychology of the individual?"

"Precisely, sir."

I shook my head, a bit discouraged. Doubts had begun to creep in.

"Well, spring it, Jeeves," I said. "But I have not much hope. Having only just arrived, you cannot possibly be aware of the frightful change that has taken place in young Thos. You are probably building on your knowledge of him when last seen. Useless, Jeeves. Stirred by the prospect of getting his hooks on five of the best, this blighted boy has become so dashed virtuous that his armor seems to contain no chink. I mocked at his waistline and sneered at his school and he merely smiled in a pale, dying-duck sort of way. Well, that'll show you. However, let us hear what you have to suggest."

"It occurred to me, sir, that the most judicious plan in the circumstances would be for you to request Mrs. Travers to invite Master Sebastian Moon here for a short visit."

I shook the onion again. The scheme sounded to me like apple sauce, and Grade A apple sauce, at that.

"What earthly good will that do?" I asked, not without a touch of asperity. "Why Sebastian Moon?"

"He has golden curls, sir."

"What of it?"

"The strongest natures are sometimes not proof against long golden curls."

Well, it was a thought, of course. But I can't say I was leaping

about to any great extent. It might be that the sight of Sebastian Moon would break down Thos's iron self-control to the extent of causing him to inflict mayhem on the person, but I wasn't any too hopeful.

"It may be so, Jeeves."

"I do not think I am too sanguine, sir. You must remember that Master Moon, apart from his curls, has a personality which is not uniformly pleasing. He is apt to express himself with a breezy candor which I fancy Master Thomas might feel inclined to resent in one some years his junior."

I had had a feeling all along that there was a flaw somewhere, and now it seemed to me that I had spotted it.

"But, Jeeves. Granted that little Sebastian is the pot of poison you indicate, why won't he act just as forcibly on young Bonzo as on Thos? Pretty silly we should look if our nominee started putting it across him. Never forget that already Bonzo is twenty marks down and falling back in the betting."

"I do not anticipate any such contingency, sir. Master Travers is in love, and love is a very powerful restraining influence at the age of thirteen."

"H'm." I mused. "Well, we can but try, Jeeves."

"Yes, sir."

"I'll get Aunt Dahlia to write to Sippy tonight."

I'm bound to say that the spectacle of little Sebastian when he arrived two days later did much to remove pessimism from my outlook. If ever there was a kid whose whole appearance seemed to call aloud to any right-minded boy to lure him into a quiet spot and inflict violence upon him, that kid was undeniably Sebastian Moon. He reminded me strongly of Little Lord Fauntleroy. I marked young Thos's demeanor closely at the moment of their meeting and, unless I was much mistaken, there came into his eyes the sort of look which would come into those of an Indian chief—Chinchagook, let us say, or Sitting Bull—just before he started reaching for his scalping knife. He had the air of one who is about ready to begin.

True, his manner as he shook hands was guarded. Only a keen observer could have detected that he was stirred to his depths. But I had seen, and I summoned Jeeves forthwith.

"Jeeves," I said, "if I appeared to think poorly of that scheme of yours, I now withdraw my remarks. I believe you have found the

way. I was noticing Thos at the moment of impact. His eyes had a strange gleam."

"Indeed, sir?"

"He shifted uneasily on his feet and his ears wiggled. He had, in short, the appearance of a boy who was holding himself in with an effort almost too great for his frail body."

"Yes, sir?"

"Yes, Jeeves. I received a distinct impression of something being on the point of exploding. Tomorrow I shall ask Aunt Dahlia to take the two warts for a country ramble, to lose them in some sequestered spot, and to leave the rest to Nature."

"It is a good idea, sir."

"It is more than a good idea, Jeeves," I said. "It is a pip."

You know, the older I get the more firmly do I become convinced that there is no such thing as a pip in existence. Again and again have I seen the apparently sure thing go phut, and now it is rarely indeed that I can be lured from my aloof skepticism. Fellows come sidling up to me at the Drones and elsewhere, urging me to invest on some horse that can't lose even if it gets struck by lightning at the starting post, but Bertram Wooster shakes his head. He has seen too much of life to be certain of anything.

If anyone had told me that my Cousin Thos, left alone for an extended period of time with a kid of the superlative foulness of Sebastian Moon, would not only refrain from cutting off his curls with a pocketknife and chasing him across country into a muddy pond but would actually return home carrying the gruesome kid on his back because he had got a blister on his foot, I would have laughed scornfully. I knew Thos, I knew his work. I had seen him in action. And I was convinced that not even the prospect of collecting five pounds would be enough to give him pause.

And yet what happened? In the quiet evenfall, when the little birds were singing their sweetest and all Nature seemed to whisper of hope and happiness, the blow fell. I was chatting with old Mr. Anstruther on the terrace when suddenly round a bend in the drive the two kids hove in view. Sebastian, seated on Thos's back, his hat off and his golden curls floating on the breeze, was singing as much as he could remember of a comic song, and Thos, bowed down by the burden but carrying on gamely, was trudging along, smiling that bally saintlike smile of his. He parked the kid on the front steps and came across to us.

"Sebastian got a nail in his shoe," he said in a low, virtuous voice. "It hurt him to walk, so I gave him a piggyback."

I heard old Mr. Anstruther draw in his breath sharply.

"All the way home?"

"Yes, sir."

"In this hot sunshine?"

"Yes, sir."

"But was he not very heavy?"

"He was a little, sir," said Thos, uncorking the saintlike once more. "But it would have hurt him awfully to walk."

I pushed off. I had had enough. If ever a septuagenarian looked upon the point of handing out another bonus, that septuagenarian was old Mr. Anstruther. He had the unmistakable bonus glitter in his eye. I withdrew, and found Jeeves in my bedroom messing about with ties and things.

He pursed the lips a bit on hearing the news.

"Serious, sir."

"Very serious, Jeeves."

"I had feared this, sir."

"Had you? I hadn't. I was convinced Thos would have massacred young Sebastian. I banked on it. It just shows what the greed for money will do. This is a commercial age, Jeeves. When I was a boy, I would cheerfully have forfeited five quid in order to deal faithfully with a kid like Sebastian. I would have considered it money well spent."

"You are mistaken, sir, in your estimate of the motives actuating Master Thomas. It was not a mere desire to win five pounds that caused him to curb his natural impulses."

"Eh?"

"I have ascertained the true reason for his change of heart, sir."

I felt fogged.

"Religion, Jeeves?"

"No, sir. Love."

"Love?"

"Yes, sir. The young gentleman confided in me during a brief conversation in the hall shortly after luncheon. We had been speaking for a while on neutral subjects, when he suddenly turned a deeper shade of pink and after some slight hesitation inquired of me if I did not think Miss Greta Garbo the most beautiful woman at present in existence."

I clutched the brow.

"Jeeves! Don't tell me Thos is in love with Greta Garbo?"

"Yes, sir. Unfortunately such is the case. He gave me to understand that it had been coming on for some time, and her last picture settled the issue. His voice shook with an emotion which it was impossible to misread. I gathered from his observations, sir, that he proposes to spend the remainder of his life trying to make himself worthy of her."

It was a knockout. This was the end.

"This is the end, Jeeves," I said. "Bonzo must be a good forty marks behind by now. Only some sensational and spectacular outrage upon the public weal on the part of young Thos could have enabled him to wipe out the lead. And of that there is now, apparently, no chance."

"The eventuality does appear remote, sir."

I brooded.

"Uncle Thomas will have a fit when he comes back and finds Anatole gone."

"Yes, sir."

"Aunt Dahlia will drain the bitter cup to the dregs."

"Yes, sir."

"And, speaking from a purely selfish point of view, the finest cooking I have ever bitten will pass out of my life for ever, unless the Snettishams invite me in some night to take pot luck. And that eventuality is also remote."

"Yes, sir."

"Then the only thing I can do is square the shoulders and face the inevitable."

"Yes, sir."

"Like some aristocrat of the French Revolution popping into the tumbril, what? The brave smile. The stiff upper lip."

"Yes, sir."

"Right ho, then. Is the shirt studded?"

"Yes, sir."

"The tie chosen?"

"Yes, sir."

"The collar and evening underwear all in order?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I'll have a bath and be with you in two ticks."

It is all very well to talk about the brave smile and the stiff upper lip, but my experience—and I daresay others have found the



same—is that they are a dashed sight easier to talk about than actually to fix on the face. For the next few days, I'm bound to admit, I found myself, in spite of every effort, registering gloom pretty consistently. For, as if to make things tougher than they might have been, Anatole at this juncture suddenly developed a cooking streak which put all his previous efforts in the shade.

Night after night we sat at the dinner table, the food melting in our mouths, and Aunt Dahlia would look at me and I would look at Aunt Dahlia, and the male Snettisham would ask the female Snettisham in a ghastly, gloating sort of way if she had ever tasted such cooking and the female Snettisham would smirk at the male Snettisham and say she never had in all her puff, and I would look at Aunt Dahlia and Aunt Dahlia would look at me and our eyes would be full of unshed tears, if you know what I mean.

And all the time old Mr. Anstruther's visit drawing to a close.

The sands running out, so to speak.

And then, on the very last afternoon of his stay, the thing happened.

It was one of those warm, drowsy, peaceful afternoons. I was up in my bedroom, getting off a spot of correspondence which I had neglected of late, and from where I sat I looked down on the shady lawn, fringed with its gay flowerbeds. There was a bird or two hopping about, a butterfly or so fluttering to and fro, and an assortment of bees buzzing hither and thither. In a garden chair sat old Mr. Anstruther, getting his eight hours. It was a sight which, had I had less on my mind, would no doubt have soothed the old soul a bit. The only blot on the landscape was Lady Snettisham, walking among the flowerbeds and probably sketching out future menus, curse her.

And so for a time everything carried on. The birds hopped, the butterflies fluttered, the bees buzzed, and old Mr. Anstruther snored—all in accordance with the programme. And I worked through a letter to my tailor to the point where I proposed to say something pretty strong about the way the right sleeve of my last coat bagged.

There was a tap on the door, and Jeeves entered, bringing the second post. I laid the letters listlessly on the table beside me.

"Well, Jeeves," I said sombrely.

"Sir?"

"Mr. Anstruther leaves tomorrow."

"Yes, sir."

I gazed down at the sleeping septuagenarian.

"In my young days, Jeeves," I said, "however much I might have been in love, I could never have resisted the spectacle of an old gentleman asleep like that in a deck chair. I would have done *something* to him, no matter what the cost."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes. Probably with a pea-shooter. But the modern boy is degenerate. He has lost his vim. I suppose Thos is indoors on this lovely afternoon, showing Sebastian his stamp album or something. Ha!" I said, and I said it rather nastily.

"I fancy Master Thomas and Master Sebastian are playing in the stableyard, sir. I encountered Master Sebastian not long back and he informed me that he was on his way thither."

"The motion pictures, Jeeves," I said, "are the curse of the age. But for them, if Thos had found himself alone in a stableyard with a kid like Sebastian—"

I broke off. From some point to the southwest, out of my line of vision, there had proceeded a piercing squeal.

It cut through the air like a knife, and old Mr. Anstruther leaped up as if it had run into the fleshy part of his leg. And the next moment little Sebastian appeared, going well and followed at a short interval by Thos, who was going even better. In spite of the fact that he was hampered in his movements by a large stable bucket which he bore in his right hand, Thos was running a great race. He had almost come up with Sebastian, when the latter, with great presence of mind, dodged behind Mr. Anstruther, and there for a moment the matter rested.

But only for a moment. Thos, for some reason plainly stirred to the depths of his being, moved adroitly to one side and, poising the bucket for an instant, discharged its contents. And Mr. Anstruther, who had just moved to the same side, received, as far as I could gather from a distance, the entire consignment. In one second, without any previous training or upbringing, he had become the wettest man in Worcestershire.

"Jeeves!" I cried.

"Yes, indeed, sir," said Jeeves, and seemed to me to put the whole thing in a nutshell.

Down below, things were hotting up nicely. Old Mr. Anstruther may have been frail, but he undoubtedly had his moments. I have rarely seen a man of his years conduct himself with such a lissom

abandon. There was a stick lying beside the chair, and with this in hand he went into action like a two-year-old. A moment later, he and Thos had passed out of the picture round the side of the house, Thos cutting out a rare pace but, judging from the sounds of anguish, not quite good enough to distance the field.

The tumult and the shouting died; and, after gazing for a while with considerable satisfaction at the Snettisham, who was standing there with a sandbagged look watching her nominee pass right out of the betting, I turned to Jeeves. I felt quietly triumphant. It is not often that I score off him, but now I had scored in no uncertain manner.

"You see, Jeeves," I said, "I was right and you were wrong. Blood will tell. Once a Thos, always a Thos. Can the leopard change his spots or the Ethiopian his what-not? What was that thing they used to teach us at school about expelling Nature?"

"You may expel Nature with a pitchfork, sir, but she will always return? In the original Latin—"

"Never mind about the original Latin. The point is that I told you Thos could not resist those curls, and he couldn't. You would have it that he could."

"I do not fancy it was the curls that caused the upheaval, sir."

"Must have been."

"No, sir. I think Master Sebastian had been speaking disparagingly of Miss Garbo."

"Eh? Why would he do that?"

"I suggested that he should do so, sir, not long ago when I encountered him on his way to the stableyard. It was a move which he was very willing to take, as he informed me that in his opinion Miss Garbo was definitely inferior both in beauty and talent to Miss Clara Bow, for whom he has long nourished a deep regard. From what we have just witnessed, sir, I imagine that Master Sebastian must have introduced the topic into the conversation at an early point."

I sank into a chair. The Wooster system can stand just so much.

"Jeeves!"

"Sir?"

"You tell me that Sebastian Moon, a stripling of such tender years that he can go about the place with long curls without causing mob violence, is in love with Clara Bow?"

"And has been for some little time, he gave me to understand, sir."

"Jeeves, this Younger Generation is hot stuff."

"Yes, sir."

"Were you like that in your day?"

"No, sir."

"Nor I, Jeeves. At the age of fourteen I once wrote to Marie Lloyd for her autograph, but apart from that my private life could bear the strictest investigation. However, that is not the point. The point is, Jeeves, that once more I must pay you a marked tribute."

"Thank you very much, sir."

"Once more you have stepped forward like the great man you are and spread sweetness and light in no uncertain measure."

"I am glad to have given satisfaction, sir. Would you be requiring my services any further?"

"You mean you wish to return to Bognor and its shrimps? Do so, Jeeves, and stay there another fortnight, if you wish. And may success attend your net."

"Thank you very much, sir."

I eyed the man fixedly. His head stuck out at the back, and his eyes sparkled with the light of pure intelligence.

"I am sorry for the shrimp that tries to pit its feeble cunning against you, Jeeves," I said.

And I meant it.

---

*(Continued from page 2.)*

Altogether, a lot of fun. And for anyone, Christie fan or not, a useful collection of information about much that crops up in any story set in England.

If you think you'd like to sub-

scribe, you can write to WOM'N, P.O. Box 1616, Canal Street Station, New York, New York 10013. A year's subscription (12 issues) is \$30. A single issue is \$3.

---

**Cathleen Jordan**, Editor; **Lois Adams**, Managing Editor; **Brian Cox**, Editorial Assistant; **Ralph Rubino**, Art Director; **Gerry Hawkins**, Associate Art Director; **Ron Kuliner**, Art Editor; **Dennis Doyle**, Associate Designer; **Nancy Siwinski**, Art Assistant; **Carole Dixon**, Production Manager; **Judy S. Brown**, Production Assistant; **Cynthia Manson**, Director, Subsidiary Rights; **Florence Eichin**, Manager, Contracts & Permissions; **Louise Mugar**, Circulation Director, Retail Marketing; **James R. Caulkins**, Circulation Planning Director; **Laura Guth**, Circulation Director, Subscriptions; **Veena Raghavan**, Public Relations Promotions Manager; **Irene Bozoki**, Classified Advertising Director; **Jamie Fillon**, Advertising Manager; **William F. Battista**, Publisher

(New York: 212-557-9100; Chicago: 312-346-0712; Los Angeles: 213-785-3114)

---

**Joel Davis**, President; **Fred Edinger**, Senior Vice President, Finance; **Paula Collins**, Senior Vice President, Circulation; **Carl Bartee**, Vice President, Manufacturing; **Stephen Policoff**, Assistant Vice President, Controller

# BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon

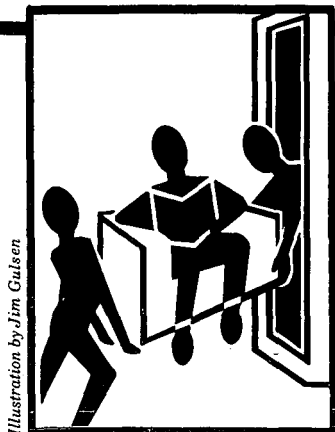


Illustration by Jim Gulsen

**D**orothy Simpson's British Inspector Luke Thanet makes his latest appearance in **Dead on Arrival** (Scribner's, \$14.95, 242 pp.), and if you're already a fan of Ruth Rendell, now is the time for you to get acquainted with Simpson. Thanet is a solid, sound character whose married life provides him with some anxiety and much consolation. He has the same imperturbable, philosophical attitude in his job, that of homicide investigator; this time the fatal bashing of a lonely young man turns up a multitude of motives—and a few surprising twists. Simpson's drama is drawn from her serious characterizations as well as her murder plots, and she writes with a nice eye for psychological detail and a firm grasp of the credible.

**An Educated Murder** is an auspicious debut for British writer J.R. Hulland (St. Martin's, \$14.95, 223 pp.). Its strength is in the characterization of protagonist Kate Henderson, an unmarried mother whose daughter has just left home for college. Kate is also a returning student, attending the local teachers' college with a legacy left her by her lover, a woman professor who was killed in an auto accident some months earlier. Kate is a surprisingly sym-

pathetic heroine who definitely doesn't deserve the attention given her by the police investigating a campus murder—or the even more deadly attention of a clever psychotic. This novel is serious, compelling, and more believable in its portrayals of Kate and her relationships than in the machinations of the killer.

William Marshall's latest "Yellowthread Street Mystery," set in the seedy side of Hong Kong, is **Head First** (Henry Holt, \$14.95, 186 pp.). When local fishermen net a casket containing a headless corpse, Chief Inspector Harry Feiffer takes the matter seriously because the Chinese people believe dismemberment prevents them from ever attaining their eternal reward. As Feiffer soon learns, that is just the first in a series of grave-robbing corpse mutilations. The question is, *why*? And as Feiffer struggles with his grim case, his colleague O'Yee is trying to track down an anonymous female who keeps phoning him and urging him to find her. As always, Marshall's latest really defies description. But, as always, *Head First* is dangerously funny, madcap, and paced like greased lightning.

Another mystery off the beaten path is **Gants** by Richard K. Abshire and William R. Clair (Dell, \$3.50, 221 pp.). The setting is Dallas, where a slasher has been striking fear into the hearts of the natives, and where a retired police captain has apparently committed suicide. But homicide inspector Charlie Gants has been literally haunted ever since he entered the ex-captain's room—and only a beautiful police psychologist will believe him when he says it's murder. This reads like an express train, but I warn you: the journey leads into the realms of parapsychology and the occult, and if this isn't your cup of tea then you'll be pretty disgusted with its ending.

Janwillem van de Wetering's eleventh novel of the doings of the Amsterdam Murder Brigade is Pantheon's **Hard Rain** (\$15.95, 277 pp.). This one focuses on the gentlemanly commissaris, who quietly and stubbornly refuses to drop an investigation even when he's ordered to—and even when it becomes apparent that he'll be squaring off against a powerful vice king who was his boyhood enemy. The stolid Grijpstra, the handsome de Gier, and the junior member, Cardoza, all line up loyally behind their commissaris in a bold and clever plan to dethrone the crime king. Van de Wetering is one of the surest hands at mystery writing today. I can't recommend him too heartily.

A fresh heroine on the mystery scene is the unexpected Miss Peck in L.A. Taylor's latest, **Love of Money** (Walker, \$16.95, 225

pp.). The motive for mayhem is an old one: if a long-lost daughter, taken away as an infant by her mother, isn't located in time, the deceased's millions revert to his no-good son. None of this should affect the very respectable Miss Peck, spinster and owner of a small typing bureau. But a bomb planted in her storeroom grabs her attention, and when it's followed by the disappearance of one of the Peck Agency typists—well, it's too much like one of the gothic plots of Miss Peck's friend's (and client's) manuscripts! It's Miss Peck's intuition and spunk that stand between a murderer and millions of dollars.

Harper & Row's Perennial Mystery Library has just reissued Robert Bernard's **Deadly Meeting**, first published back in 1970. The setting will appeal to anyone interested in academia, for the first murder takes place at a college English teachers' convention suspiciously similar to the annual MLA meeting. And then the locale switches to the English department in a small New England university. The detective is Dame Millicent Hetherege, a British medievalist hired to fill in for the term. Much to a murderer's chagrin, Dame Millicent arrives fully prepared to solve the department's crime problems as well. (\$3.95, 250 pp.)

It's Christmas in the springtime if you pick up W. J. Burley's latest, **Wycliffe and the Quiet Virgin** (Doubleday Crime Club, \$12.95, 179 pp.). With his wife out of England, Wycliffe accepts an invitation to spend the holidays in Cornwall with the Bishop family. The vacation turns into a busman's holiday, however, when the local actress playing the Virgin Mary in the Nativity play leaves the theater and apparently vanishes. Wycliffe unofficially investigates at the request of his friends—unofficially, that is, until he discovers the girl's mother's corpse.

Ed McBain's latest 87th Precinct novel, **Poison**, is something a bit different (Arbor House, \$16.95, 242 pp.). Detective Hal Willis is the protagonist, along with other members of the 87th crew. But at the heart of *Poison* is a woman—Marilyn Hollis, wealthy, stunningly beautiful, disconcertingly candid. She's also the only link Willis has between two recent murders, both of former lovers of Marilyn's. And as Willis's investigation progresses, Willis himself becomes deeply involved with his prime suspect, who reveals a little more of her past at each turn of the case. This is deftly plotted and compulsively readable, and Marilyn is a character not soon forgotten.

Joseph Hansen's fans have been waiting a few years for a new Dave Brandstetter mystery. **The Little Dog Laughed** is out now,



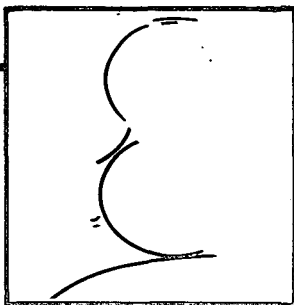
and it's worth the waiting. Comparisons of Hansen to Ross Macdonald seem absolutely justified with this book, although Hansen really deserves to be classed by himself by now. The plot, however, very much involves the California private eye milieu. A beautiful, blind teenaged girl discovers her journalist father's body, and can hardly believe the verdict of suicide. Neither can the insurance company that hires Brandstetter to investigate suspicious claims. From there this tale spins out beyond a simple case of murder and into larger frames of reference. Hansen, like others before him, uses the mystery genre as a mere starting point, and from there he chooses to focus attention on some politics he obviously abhors. The writing matches the story—terse, uncompromising, and very compelling. (Henry Holt, \$15.95, 184 pp.)

R. Austin Freeman's name is known to all mystery scholars as the creator of the great Dr. Thorndyke, a popular detective who was plying his trade in the early 1900's. **The Red Thumb Mark**, originally published in 1907, has been reprinted by Dover in a sturdy trade paperback (\$5.95, 305 pp.) and is definitely worth reading. This novel introduces John Evelyn Thorndyke as well as his own Watson, the narrator, Dr. Christopher Jervis, and Thorndyke's Bunter figure, his technical assistant Nathaniel Polton. This book is also famous for Thorndyke's "amazing" scientific findings regarding fingerprints and their use in forensics. Furthermore, the novel is well written and provides an entertaining peek into the British trial system of the period, as well as an amusing look at courtship in those days.

Another trip back in time can be had for the price of K.K. Beck's **Murder in a Mummy Case** (Walker, \$15.95, 165 pp.). In this mystery Beck brings back her 1920's flapper heroine, Iris Cooper, who also starred in *Death in a Deck Chair*. This time Iris is a houseguest in a California mansion at the invitation of her Stanford classmate Clarence Brockhurst, a young man perhaps more serious about his study of archaeology than of Iris's charms. That doesn't bother Iris, who finds fascinating material in the other members of the family—the lad's wild sister, scatty mother, and businessman father—not to mention the other houseguests and the Chinese butler. But when a flirty maid is found dead in Clarence's mummy case, the exotic list of house-dwellers takes on a more sinister air, and Iris isn't disappointed when her newspaperman friend Jack Clancy shows up on the doorstep to get the scoop. This is breezy, lighthearted fun in the old fashioned way it's intended to be.

# MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



**T**he movies prove to have been ideal for every kind of mystery and tale of detection but one: comedy. **The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940**, now running on stage in New York, reminds us that for successful spoofs, the stage is the thing. The secret probably lies in the matter of acting styles. Comedy often requires a bit of exaggeration, which is natural to the stage but often seems strained on the screen. It is hard to imagine, for example, how the farcical stage thrillers *Corpse*, which we reviewed last year, or Anthony Shaffer's *Whodunnit*, reviewed in 1983, could be made into successful movies.

*The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940* takes place at the Chappaqua, New York, estate

of Elsa von Grossenknueten. An eccentric backer of Broadway shows, she has arranged to audition a musical in her own living room. The catch is that she has invited the creative team from a previous show that was forced to close when a "slasher" began killing the chorus girls one by one. She and police detective Kelly believe they can uncover the identity of the slasher by the time the fake audition is over.

Among those gathered at the house are a second-rate young comedian and an aspiring chorus girl who have been hired to sing the songs, a self-important Hollywood/Broadway director, and an aging, drunken female librettist. Naturally they are all soon cut off from the world by a mandatory sealed-

house-mystery snowstorm and by the phone's going dead. In addition, the electricity sputters off and on as the plot requires.

Unbeknownst to anyone save the killer, moreover, a murder has been committed before the arrival of the first guest, providing a subplot having to do with German spies recently landed on Long Island. It hardly needs to be added that the living room features three revolving bookcases leading to a warren of secret corridors built by Elsa von Grossenkneuten's father.

Murders, corny jokes, musical comedy numbers in rehearsal, quick entrances and exits by a hooded killer, sinister German accents, 1940's-style downing of oversized cocktails, and a romance between the chorus girl and the comedian follow one another in quick succession. At the same time, hastily stowed corpses come flopping out from behind the drapery and teeter forward when the closet door is opened.

Surprisingly, the action isn't hard to follow. It soon becomes clear that both a Broadway slasher and a German spy are on the premises. With a little careful thought at intermission, it's possible to narrow down the suspects consider-

ably. Of course there are some tricks in the ending, but for all the laughs, the play adds up logically.

Playwrights who stage mysteries usually give us one or more characters who are playing false roles, and as often as not these characters are actors or theater people like the hired actors and the creative team putting on the audition in *Musical Comedy Murders*. This use of theater people, besides being a surefire way of getting laughs, poses for the audience the problem of deciding whether or not the eccentric behavior it is witnessing signals guilt. The audience's dilemma is of course compounded, as are the laughs, if the actors are understood to be second-rate hams, which is also the case in *Musical Comedy Murders*. For example, why does the third actor hired for the audition have an Irish accent that skitters off into a German accent? Is he a German spy or a struggling actor pretending to be an Irishman in order to get a day's work?

This kind of broad effect, in our opinion, can be carried off far better on stage than in the movies. That's why we don't expect a screen version of *Musical Comedy Murders*, but do predict a long run for it at Greenwich Village's Circle Repertory.

# THE STORY THAT WON



The February Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by Art Cosing of Arlington, Virginia. Honorable mentions go to Michael C. McPherson of Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada; Liz Case of Hagensborg, British Columbia, Canada; David Martindale of Houston, Texas; Steven Wineinger of North Haven, Connecticut; William Poling of Bedford, Indiana; M. P. Lennie of Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Sally Irene Gerrish of Buzzards Bay, Massachusetts; Betty Tachoir of Clairton, Pennsylvania; Patrice A. Watson of Davie, Florida; Ann Curtis of Checotah, Oklahoma; Edward R. Golson of Ranchester, Wyoming; and Katherine Latham von Physter of San Diego, California.

---

## A TRIP DOWNTOWN by Art Cosing

---

My best friend, Tommy (he's almost ten), it was him what took me aside after school. We'd both spent two hours in detention for a small food fight in the cafeteria at lunchtime and Tommy said, "We gotta go downtown to the city museum. They got dinosaurs and they got naked ladies. Honest."

The bus ride downtown could have been boring, but we amused ourselves by picking the stuffing out of the rear seats.

The museum was great. There were some real cool dinosaurs in one big room, along with pictures of hairy cavemen, and big boulders with scratchings on them, and broken bowls, and stone axes, and stuff like that.

But there was also naked ladies everywhere else. Everywhere we looked. Oil paintings. Drawings. Water colors. And statues.

It was the strangest thing, though. Almost half of the lady statues had no arms.

Tommy knew about such things, he said. Those statues without arms was the most valuable. I asked one of the museum guards, and he agreed with Tommy. Those naked ladies without arms was the real pride of the museum.

It was getting near closing time, so Tommy and I hid in the men's room until all of the guards had left. Then we raced back to the dinosaur room and we each grabbed one of them caveman stone axes. We knew how we were gonna make all of them other lady statues with arms more valuable.

# CLASSIFIED

# MARKET

AH-JULY/87

ALFRED HITCHCOCK — published 13 times a year. CLASSIFIED AD rate is \$2.60 per word — payable in advance — (\$39.00 minimum). Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional.

## ART

AMERICAN expressionism, original art. \$20.00, \$10.00, \$5.00, \$1.00. Starnes, 6 Danemar Drive, Middletown, NJ 07748. Percharitycent.

## AUTOMOBILES & MIDGET CARS

IS it True...Jeeps For \$44 Through The Government? Call For Facts! 1-312-742-1142 Ext. 4674.

## BARGAINS

WHOLESALE Jewelry/Novelties! No minimum order! Rush \$1.00 for complete catalog: K&M Distributor (AH), Fiskeville, R.I. 02823.

## BOOKS & PERIODICALS

FREE LIST! Used Hardcover mystery and detective fiction. Dunn's Mysteries, Box 2544, Meriden, CT 06450.

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperbacks, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box Z-54, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

FREE CATALOG. Used hardback mystery, crime and detective books. Steve Powell, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, Maine 04609.

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK! Join our successful authors. Publicity, advertising, beautiful books. All subjects invited. Send for fact-filled booklet and free manuscript report. Carlton Press, Dept. SMS, 11 West 32 Street, New York 10001.

MAKE YOUR CLASSIFIED AD PAY. Get "How to Write A Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth \$2.00 towards a classified ad in this publication. Send \$2.25 (includes postage) to I.M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

MYSTERIES/Thrillers. Free list available. Firsts, hardbacks, paperbacks. Time and Again Books, 364 Main, North Andover, Mass. 01845.

## BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

WRITERS! Lawrence Block's books, tapes, seminars really help! Details free. WFYL, 3750-E Estero, Ft. Myers Beach, FL 33931.

SKULLS ARE FOREVER! Large, illustrated book of Intriguing Mania. Unlike anything you've ever seen. Fun and incredible!! Guaranteed. \$12.95: SKULLS, 8536 Aponi, Vienna, VA 22180.

FREE CATALOG, hardcover, paperback mysteries. MURDER BY MAIL, Dept. 22, 600 Mystic Valley Pkwy., Suite 295, Medford, MA 02155.

HALF PRICE MYSTERY/Sci-Fi. Send for free catalog. Book Place, 2710 Middlefield Rd., Palo Alto, CA 94306.

SAVINGS Selection Service. Free Mystery Catalog. Murder By The Book. Box 231, Akron, Ohio 44308-0231.

SEND 25c for Large Listing of Mystery and Detective Books. Canford, Drawer 216E, Freeville, N.Y. 13068.

DETECTIVE-MYSTERY. Free catalogues. Paperback and hardback. \$2 to \$7. Box 15460, Orlando, Florida 32858-5460.

## BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

\$1,000 Weekly Home Business Directory. Free Details. Name and address to: Box 1610-DP, Darien, Connecticut, 06820-1610.

STAY HOME! MAKE MONEY ADDRESSING ENVELOPES. VALUABLE GENUINE OFFER. 20¢. Write Lindco, 3636-DA Peterson Ave., Chicago, IL 60659.

THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR THE ZIP CODE: please use it when ordering merchandise from classified advertisements. You'll receive faster delivery.

HOMEWORKERS! EARN 60¢ each envelope you return to us, according to instructions. Write: Distributors, Box 431-DP, Lynbrook, New York 11563.

# PLACE

# CLASSIFIED

AH-JULY/87

To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

## BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

**"\$1,000's WEEKLY!" MAILING LETTERS! FANTASTIC OPPORTUNITY! EXCITING FREE DETAILS! START IMMEDIATELY! WRITE: SUCCESS, #605-DPG, DRESHER, PA 19025.**

**\$200 Profit Daily With Your Own Professional Housecleaning Service. No Investment. Details: Westfield, Box 83-E, Middleton, Wisconsin 53562.**

**EXTRA Cash: Mail our Burglar Alarm Advertisement with your flyers. TT4, Box 930, Branford, FL 32008.**

## BUY IT WHOLESALE

**400,000 BARGAINS Below Wholesale! Many Free! Liquidations ... Closeouts ... Job Lots ... Single Samples. Free Details. Worldwide Bargainhunters, Box 730-IO, Holland, MI 49423.**

**SINGAPORE, HONG KONG, TAIWAN directories. Listing 11,000 suppliers, 20,000 products. Buy direct! Information \$1.00: Merrick Distributing, Box 274B, Merrick, NY 11566.**

**FIREWORKS! Great prices! Huge selection! Free catalog. Kellners Fireworks, Box 67, Oil City, PA 16301.**

**CLOSEOUTS! Discounts! Below wholesale! Liquidations! Freebies! All kinds! Information (Stamp): DDN, Box 20152-D, Ferndale, Michigan 48220.**

## EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

**WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, Newbern, NC 28560.**

**FREE COLLEGE TAPE External Degree Programs Business Administration, Public Administration, Law (Qualify Bar Admission). Fully Accredited, Financial Aid, (800) 847-0005, (314) 426-0653 La Salle University, 3623 Saint Gregory, Saint Louis, Missouri 63074.**

## GIFTS THAT PLEASE

**A gift sure to please—ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, published monthly. Send \$19.50 for 13 issues (includes shipping & postage) to Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 1933, Marion, OH 43305.**

## HYPNOTISM

**FREE hypnotism, sleep learning catalog! Tape cassettes, books, equipment. DLMH, Box 487, Anaheim, CA 92805.**

## INDIAN RELICS, GOODS & CRAFTS

**TRADITIONAL Native American methods of Shamanism Newsletter \$2.00: Hohokam Press, 1713 East Broadway Road/Suite 280, Tempe, AZ 85282.**

## JEWELRY

**CLOSEOUT JEWELRY. 55¢ Dozen. 25¢ gets catalog. ROUSSELS, 107-310 Dow, Arlington, MA 02174-7199.**

## LOANS BY MAIL

**BORROW \$25,000 "OVERNIGHT." Any purpose. Keep indefinitely! Free Report! Success Research, Box 19739-ST, Indianapolis, IN 46219.**

**VISA\* Obtained Easily! Been Turned Down? Bankrupt? No Credit? No Problem! Write Immediately for Details! Credit-DP787, Box 2298, Sandusky, Ohio 44870. 1-(419) 625-3868.**

**CASH GRANTS available from nonprofit foundations! Never Repay! 340 sources/application instructions—\$3.00. Fundsearch, Box 191077-SR, Washington, DC 20036.**

**ARABS HAVE MILLIONS TO LEND, INVEST, PURCHASE! FREE DETAILS! PRSD, Box 417, Vidor, TX 77662.**

**SIGNATURE Cash Loans! Application Rushed! Plus the Most Exciting Financial Techniques to get you Cash! MBG-DP787, Box 2298, Sandusky, Ohio 44870. 1-(419) 625-3868.**

# Classified Continued

## MAILING LISTS

**QUALITY NAMES AT QUALITY PRICES!** Fresh opportunity seekers available for immediate shipment! D-CO, 1-219-838-7099/1-800-992-9405.

**HOT-LINE OPPORTUNITY SEEKER/MLM NAMES. GUARANTEED. FREE SAMPLE. VENTURE-LI, BOX 336, RIVIERA, AZ 86442.**

**COMPUTERIZED GUARANTEED MAIL ORDER NAMES! SPECIAL 2000 NAMES—\$29.00.** Opportunity seekers. Zip-sorted pressure sensitive labels. 22¢ refund for undeliverables. Mailed within 24 hrs. 1st class. 200 samples—\$8, 500—\$11, 1000—\$20, 5000—\$65, 10,000—\$110, 20,000—\$190, 40,000—\$340, 100,000—\$750, 200,000—\$1300. **DEALERS WANTED.** Sell names. Start FREE. The Brown Co., RR 2, Box 151, River Falls, Wisconsin 54022.

**NEW NAMES MONTHLY! MIXED STATES AVAILABLE! IMMEDIATE SHIPMENT!** Adhesive Labels; Computerized—Guaranteed Opportunity Seekers 200/\$15; 500/\$25; 1000/\$40. Others. Advon, Drawer B3, Shelley, ID 83274. Visa/MC/AmEx. 1-800-992-3866.

## MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

**CAN** You stuff 1000 envelopes for \$500.00 weekly? Send six 22¢ stamps. Blume, Box 866714, Plano, TX 75086.

\$60.00 per Hundred securing-stuffing envelopes from home. Offer-details: Rush stamped self-addressed envelope. Imperial, P-460, X17410, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

**EARN \$5,000 ANY WEEKEND!** Amazing new system makes it easy. No money needed. Skeptical? **FREE PROOF.** Write: Crossroads, Box 5097-B9, Babylon, NY 11707.

**"HUNDREDS WEEKLY"! GUARANTEED PROCESSING STAMPED ENVELOPES! START IMMEDIATELY! FREE DETAILS! WRITE: MJG-DPG, AMBLER, PA 19002.**

## MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

**AMAZING** New LCD Watch and gas refillable lighter on wristband. Write: Dawson Products, Box 196, Stoughton, MA 02072.

**FIRST TIME OPPORTUNITY TO GET RICH EASY. NEW MIRACLE SECRETS!** Legal 100%, Honest 200%, Profitable 800%. Guaranteed Plans! Now send \$3.00 for details: A-S Int'l Enterprise, 1018 Gold Cres., Dept. 210, Ottawa, Ont., Canada K2B 8C5.

**GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing mail! Free Supplies, Postage! No Selling! Information? Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DCM, Burnt Hills, NY 12027.**

**EASY Business, earn \$1,000's Weekly! Free details! Send Stamped Addressed Envelope: Todco, Dept. 3, 4219 W. Olive Ave., Burbank, CA 91505.**

**\$1000 WEEKLY POSSIBLE! Mailing Envelopes! Easy Guaranteed Income! Free Details: SEVENSTAR, Box 187-D, Niagara Falls, NY 14305.**

**GET RICH! Zero Investment. No Borrowing. Free Details. Money, 6520 Selma (#32H57), Los Angeles, CA 90028.**

**CLIP COUPONS FOR CASH. Details Rush \$2.00: Rivera Enterprise, 518 Central Ave., Jersey City, N.J. 07307.**

**EXCITING NEWS! Knowledge is the Key to Success. For more information write to: Barnes Publications, 1703 4th. Dept. AH-6, Woodward, OK 73801.**

**VENDING MACHINES.** No selling. Routes earn amazing profits. 32-Page Catalogue **FREE.** Parkway Corporation, 1930NO Greenspring Drive, Timonium, Maryland 21093.

**GET RICH!! Secret law smashes debts—brings Cash. Credit! Details FREE! Wealth-kit-V Box 4036, Pompano Beach, FL 33063.**

**YOU'LL MAKE  
MONEY**

**SAVE MONEY TOO—  
BY READING and ANSWERING  
THESE CLASSIFIED ADS**



# Classified Continued

AH-JULY/87

## MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

**DO YOU KNOW** "How to Write a Classified Ad that Pulls?" Instructive booklet tells how. Also includes a certificate worth \$2.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy send \$2.25 (includes postage) to I. M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

## PERSONAL

**SINGLE?** Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people, 18-80. Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

**BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE.** American—Mexican—Philippine—European. Photo selection FREE! Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista, CA 92012.

**ORIENTAL** ladies seeking correspondence, marriage. Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948.

**SINGLES, US/WORLDWIDE**, seek enlightened correspondence, sincere friendships. **SCANNA INTERNATIONAL-CO3**, Box 4, Pittsford, NY 14534.

**MEET** Sincere Singles of All Ages. Nationwide, Confidential. Write: Pentronics, P.O. Box 467MC, Washington, IA 52353.

**ASIAN WOMEN** desire Romance! Sunshine International Correspondence—Dept. HF, Box 260, North Hollywood, CA 91603. (818) 769-1717.

## RECIPES

**12 SNACK .CAKE Recipes**—Conventional/Microwave. Send \$5.00: C. A. Detrick, P.O. Box 580, Denair, CA 95316.

## SONGWRITERS

**POEMS WANTED.** Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

**SONGWRITER'S TIP SHEET. TWELVE IMPORTANT STEPS**, \$1.50. **RONDO MUSIC**, BOX 6785-D, SAN MATEO, CA 94403.

## SPORTING GOODS

**ARMY STYLE POCKET KNIFE.** Eleven precision tools built-in. To order \$12.95 + shipping and handling U.S. dollars to: **GOLDEN STAR ENTERPRISES**, 1338 Dupont Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6H 2A7.

## TAPES & CASSETTES

**OLDTIME** radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, PA 17349.

## UNUSUAL BOOKS

**THE INTELLIGENCE LIBRARY:** Many unique books & official manuals on **RESTRICTED** subjects—Bugging, Wiretapping, Locksmithing, Covert Investigation, & **MUCH MORE.** Free brochures, **MENTOR**, DP, 135-53 No. Blvd., Flushing, N.Y. 11354.

## For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

**PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:**

**Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.**

**Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.**

**Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.**

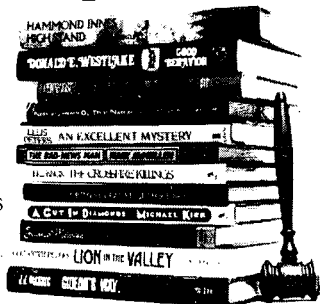
**For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.**

# Take 12 Best-Selling Mysteries for Only \$1

A \$174.40 Value in Original  
Publishers' Editions

Try 12 mysteries. We're sure your verdict will be favorable. They're worth \$174.40 in publishers' editions—but to introduce you to The Detective Book Club, we'll send you *all 12* spine-tingling novels in four hardbound triple-volumes for only \$1 plus shipping.

When you become a member of The Detective Book Club there is no minimum number of books you must buy. You may reject any selection before or after you receive it, and you may cancel at any time with no obligation whatsoever.

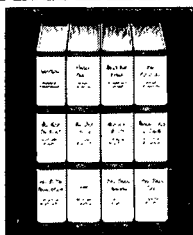


## Save up to 80% on the latest mysteries

Each club selection includes 3 newly published, full-length, unabridged novels by top-notch writers like Westlake, Innes, and Pentecost in one handsome triple-volume, all yours for just \$9.95 plus shipping. That's \$3.32 per mystery, *saving you 60% to 80% off* the publishers' list prices. Since each hardcover triple-volume is offered to you in convenient, easy-to-read form at less-than-paperback prices, we believe it's an open-and-shut case.

## Send no money now

Simply fill out the coupon below and send it to: The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, NY 11576. You'll enjoy a 10-day free trial to examine the evidence and judge for yourself with no obligation. But *act now*. If you love good mysteries, it would be a crime not to accept this offer.



Yes, please enroll me as a member and send me my 4 triple-volumes shown here, containing 12 mysteries. I enclose no money now. I may examine my books for 10 days, then will either accept all 4 volumes for only \$1 plus shipping, or return them and owe nothing.

As a member, I will receive free the Club's Preview describing my next selections. I will always have at least 10 days to reject any selection by returning the form provided. I may return any book within 21 days and owe nothing. For each triple-volume I keep, I will send you just \$9.95 plus shipping. I may cancel my membership at any time. Satisfaction Guaranteed.

Mr./Mrs./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

WALTER J. BLACK, INC.



**THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB**, Roslyn, NY 11576

Since 1942, the best way to get more mystery for your money.

D25MIV

87-BK

Note: Members accepted in USA and Canada only. Offer slightly different in Canada.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A TERRIFYING NEW MASTERWORK BY

FREDERIK POHL

# Terror

Clouded in secrecy and protected from land, sea, and air, Project Vulcan would tap the life-energy of the Earth's core. The doomsday bomb carefully placed at the weakest edge of an underwater volcano off the Hawaiian coast would cover the Earth in a dust cloud that would bring food production to a grinding halt.

Now Vulcan has fallen into the hands of terrorists. And the world watches as they grip the detonator—and make their demands.

"A daring writer... Pohl has always been willing to try something new in his fiction."

—A Reader's Guide to Science Fiction

THE MILITARY'S ULTIMATE DOOMSDAY  
WEAPON HAS BEEN DISCOVERED  
—BY TERRORISTS.

Terror

Hugo and Nebula Award-winning  
Author of *QUEST* and *HAN PLUS*

FREDERIK POHL

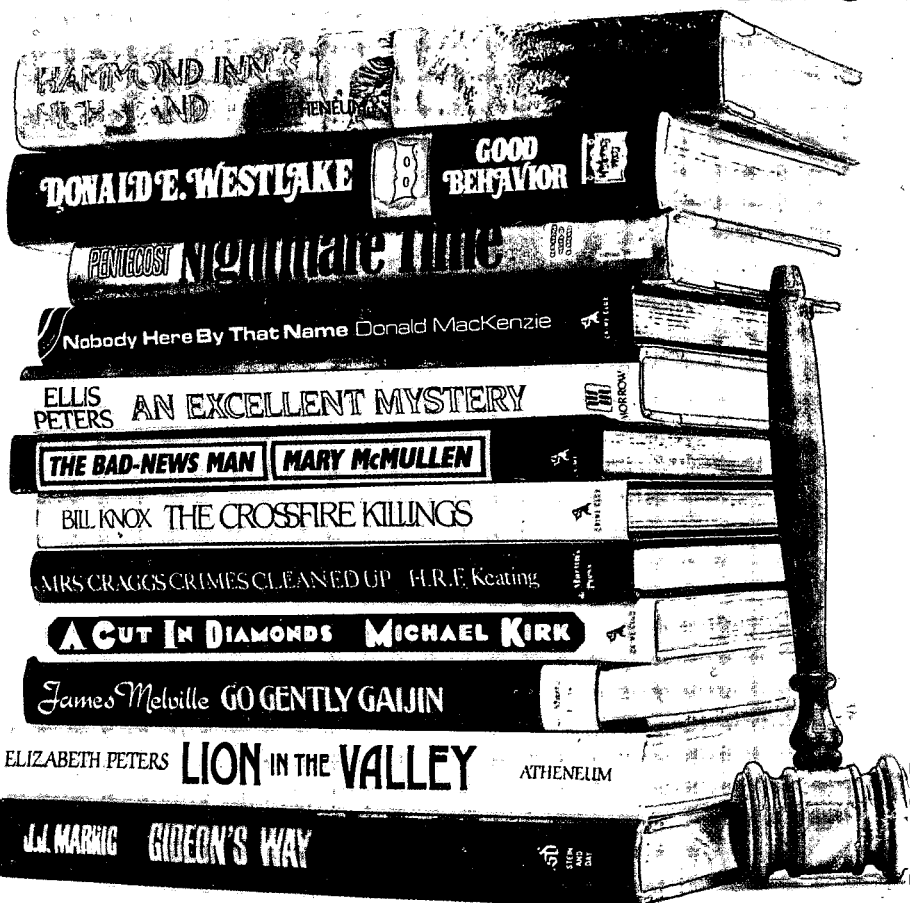


BERKLEY SCIENCE FICTION \$2.95

WWW.ELECTRONICREPRODUCTIONPROHIBITED.ORG

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# THE EVIDENCE.



## 12 MYSTERIES FOR ONLY \$1

For details see last page. PROHIBITED